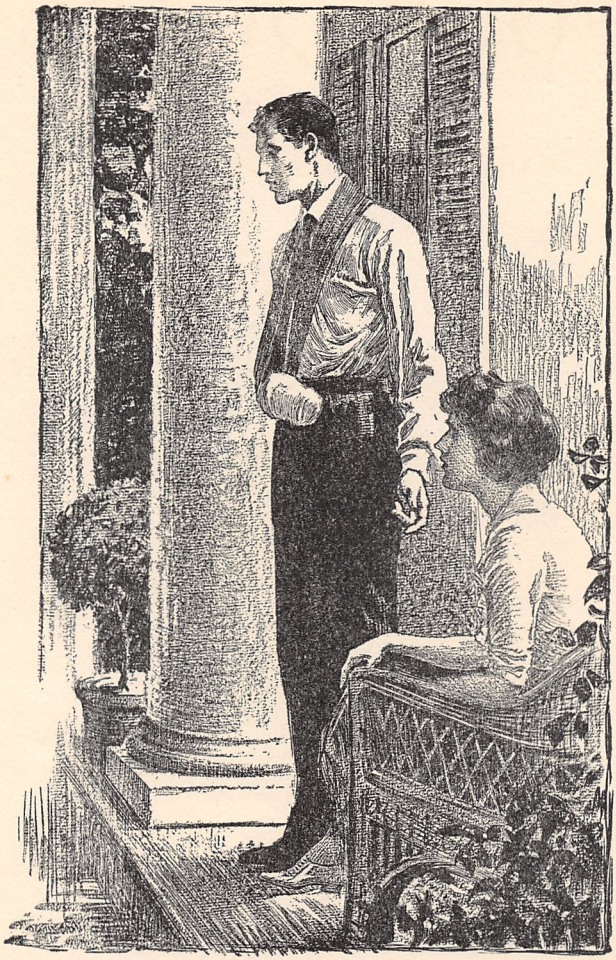
# FOURSQUARE

GRACE · S · RICHMOND

Lenore Baca.



*"The thing can be done—I know it can!"*

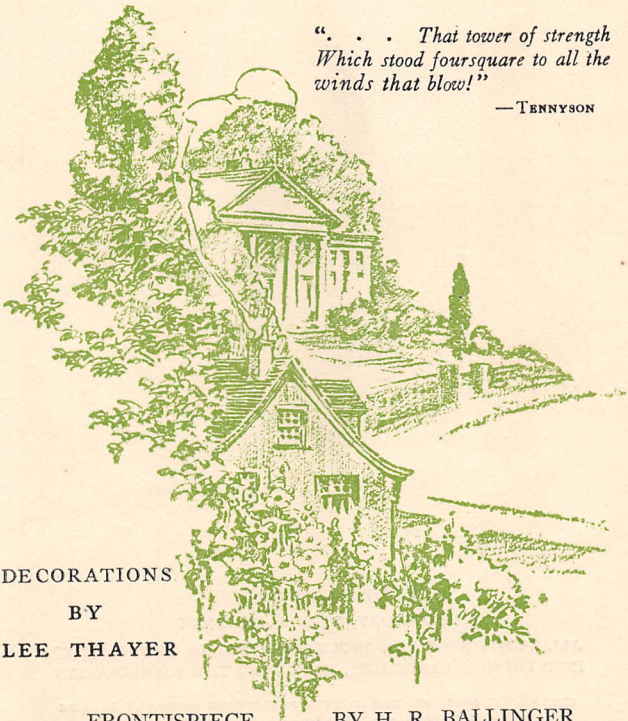
# FOURSQUARE

BY

GRACE S. RICHMOND

*". . . That tower of strength*
*Which stood foursquare to all the*
*winds that blow!"*

—TENNYSON



DECORATIONS
BY
LEE THAYER

FRONTISPIECE BY H. R. BALLINGER

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TO

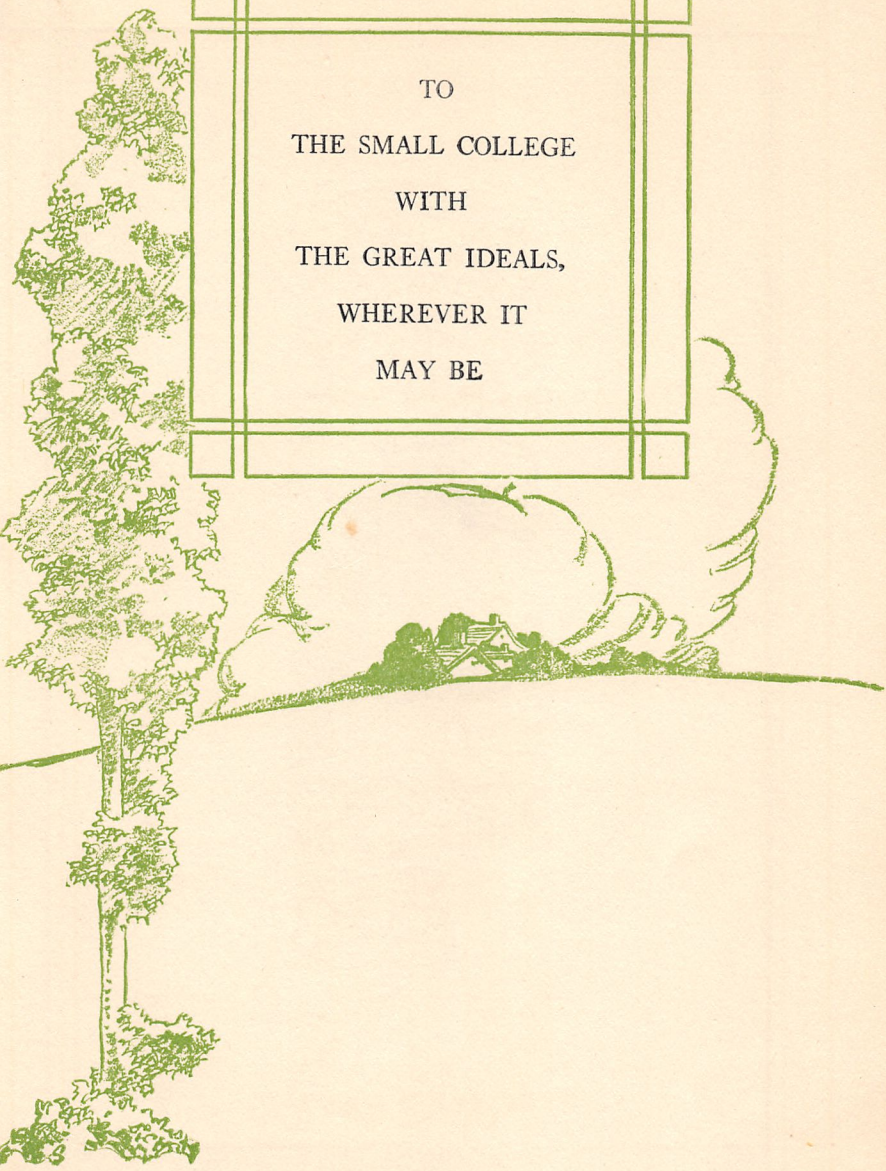
THE SMALL COLLEGE

WITH

THE GREAT IDEALS,

WHEREVER IT

MAY BE



# FOURSQUARE

## CHAPTER I

### Characterizations

WHEN on one blustering afternoon in late March Professor Mark Fenn came into the dingy old college book-shop which was one of his favourite haunts, he passed by the magazine stand in a hurry, though it was thick with all the newest April publications and vivid with their colour. His mind was upon a certain row of book-shelves in the dimmest part of the back of the shop, where he had yesterday discovered rich treasure. Almost an hour later, when he had decided, rather against his judgment but wholly according to his inclination, to purchase the full tale of seven books which he needed to complete a special group in his collection, he passed the magazine stand again, and this time he halted. He had caught sight of the name of *Mary Fletcher*, emblazoned in large letters upon the cover of *The Centrepiece*.

He put down his book and picked up the magazine, frowning a little. Why should Mary be writing for *The Centrepiece?* He ran hastily through the pages—he didn't have to go far, for the story he sought was well toward the front, as Mary Fletcher's things always were. He glanced at the opening lines—yes—there it was—the delightful, sparkling style which flashed at you from the cold print with the first distinctive paragraph. There were the exquisite illustrations—her editors never gave Mary anything but the best, these days.

Mark Fenn fished a dingy quarter from his pocket, waved it at Booth, the old bookseller—just now occupied with another customer—and placed it on the magazine stand. He folded the bulky *Centrepiece* in the middle and stuffed it into his overcoat pocket, picked up his package of books, and left the shop.

When Harriet Fenn came down the street from the High School where she held a teaching position, toward the little old brown house where she and her brother lived together, she saw the light in his study window which proclaimed that he had reached home before her. At this time of year she was quite sure to see that cheerful light shining from the two lower front windows, the shades undrawn—Mark never in the world thought of shutting out the passers-by, though the house lay so close to the street. Although Harriet's first move when she came in was to go and twitch the shabby old dark-red curtains together, jealous of intrusion, she was always glad Mark hadn't done it before her. That welcoming light made all the difference to a weary school-teacher, the presence of whose one brother in the old house kept it home for her, as she was sure her presence did for him.

Mark didn't hear her come in—he seldom did. She liked to let herself in quietly and steal to the door of the square, low-ceiled study, its walls lined from floor to ceiling with books, in all sorts of bookcases. From year to year Mark had

extended his ever growing collection, more eager as to the contents of the shelves than as to the beauty or uniformity of the shelves themselves. Yet the result was not inharmonious; somehow one forgot the motley character of the containers in wonder and pleasure at the wealth of the collection itself. Not that there were many fine bindings—though here and there one shone out richly; but there were rows upon rows of those volumes in sober dress which speak of serious uses, and which must make the backbone of any worthy library.

The Professor of Psychology at Newcomb College had not thrown himself, as usual, into the dingy old study armchair which he was wont to seek when he first came in after the labours of the day. Neither had he taken the spindle-backed chair which served him at his desk—it had been his father's before him. He was sitting on the edge of his desk, hat shoved back, overcoat still on, his legs braced to hold him steady, while he read with absorption from a popular magazine.

Harriet's affectionate eyes studied her brother's sturdy figure for a long minute before she spoke. She was undoubtedly prejudiced in his favour, yet there was undeniably something attractive about his looks. His was no pale, scholastic, spectacled presentment of a being who might have been normal if he hadn't developed his mind at the expense of his body. Mark was thoroughly the mature young athlete in his general aspect; his colour was healthy, his lean, well-cut features were markedly interesting; discerning gray eyes looked out below straight brows, and the firm lines of a very good mouth suggested both poise and authority. He was several years older than Harriet, who had herself been teaching for some six years since she left college, though with her fair hair and girlish figure she by no means looked as far along in the twenties as the records declared her.

"It must be a pretty interesting story, to keep you from undoing a package of new books," she observed, at length.

Mark looked up, met her scrutinizing eyes with the queer one-sided smile which she knew of old to speak not entire agreement with the proposition stated, and returned to his page.

"Dead tired, Harry?" he inquired, absent-mindedly.

"As usual. What else could I be after a week of mid-year examinations? Never mind—it's Friday night; and I've brought home oysters for supper."

"Good!" But he was still absent-minded.

She came close and looked over his shoulder for a minute or two. "Oh, by Mary Fletcher," she observed. "The girls were talking about it to-day."

Since it was the last page of the story, the name of the author was not in sight. Harriet had judged by internal evidence; she had caught the characteristic original style which was always to be recognized.

Mark read the last paragraph and dropped the magazine upon his desk, where with its gay cover it lay incongruously among its austere surroundings.

"Is it good?" Harriet asked, taking off her hat and running ordering fingers over the pale-coloured masses of her hair. "Oh, *such* a day! My whole grade has been positively on wires, every minute. As a result I'm on a wire-edge to-night, myself.—*Is* the story good, Mark?"

"It's—Mary Fletcher," her brother responded, enigmatically. "Neither more nor less. After a year of war-writing, from France, I thought it might be more."

"Her war articles were very fine, I thought. So did you."

"This is fiction."

"I'll read it, by and by. A Mary Fletcher story on Friday night will make me forget all my troubles."

"There's no possible doubt of that," he admitted.

A hot oyster stew on a March Friday night is also, for people who have been teaching all the week, a stimulant for tired nerves. When Harriet Fenn had washed and put away the supper dishes, and sat down at last in her brother Mark's big shabby armchair beside the low study light, she was in a mood to enjoy the relaxation which is one of the rewards of labour. She picked up the magazine, looking it through, turning its pages with lingering fingers. At the other side of the room Mark was crowding a row of books unmercifully to make space for a thick volume from the opened package upon his desk. Harriet glanced across at him, regarding his profile against the dark background of the books.

"Mark, you look more like Father every day," she observed, "and act like him. He was never happy till he'd put a new book in its place. Not that he had many—compared with you. How he would open his eyes at this room! You must have doubled—trebled—the number he had."

"I'm afraid I have. Where I'm reckless in buying, he'd have denied himself. I wish he hadn't. I wish—I could show him these I've brought home to-night."

Brother and sister instinctively looked up at the one picture the room contained—a dark portrait hung above the chimneypiece, with rows of books pressing close on either side. Even on the chimneyshelf, below the portrait, two uneven rows of small volumes were lined up, no further space being available for their peculiar size. The portrait looked down at the pair below steadily, with a kindly, fatherly gaze from warmly human eyes, yet with a suggestion of severity showing in the lines of the lips and the prominent chin. Though such a father might condone faults in his children he would be likely to deal harshly with the same faults in himself. It was preëminently the portrait of a scholar but, unless every aspect of him misled, the man himself had been greater than his own learning.

"You do resemble him more and more," Harriet said again. "I'm glad of that. There never was anybody like him—except you."

"I'm not a particle like him. I don't deserve to be called his son. I lost my temper at least five times to-day. In my place he would have kept his—absolutely; and had twice the influence over the offenders."

"Just the same—you're like him," Harriet persisted. "And he'd have been glad to have you buy all the books you wanted."

"Do you realize," Mark said, with sudden vehemence, "that my slim salary to-day is exactly double the biggest he ever had, in the very last years of his life? And that at the present outrageous scale of salaries! No wonder he couldn't buy books except by going without meat—which he did, bless him. I wouldn't take ten times their cost for that little old first collection of his. Do you see I've put them all together again, in his first bookcase—that he made himself? There's the library of a scholar for you—two hundred and seventy-three books with the autograph of David Matthew Fenn in every one of them. I'd like to show that library to Mary Fletcher," he added, with sudden sternness, "and tell her to study it and learn—to write!"

"To *write*, Mark! Why, I thought you thought——" Harriet looked distinctly puzzled. Her gaze fell to the magazine in her hand. Her fingers turned the pages till they came to the story. "And, Behold——" was its singular title. She looked up again. "It *looks* delightful," she temporized.

"It is delightful." Mark turned again to the portrait. "Father used to prophesy big things for her. I wonder what he'd say to her now."

"Why, Mark! Has she—lost? I've heard you say her style was inimitable."

"It is. And her technique is perfect. But——"

Harriet cried out sharply, interrupting him. "Why, here's a picture of Mary! Did you see it?—just over the leaf. '*Mary Fletcher since her return from war-work in France.*' Oh, isn't she lovely?"

Mark came across the room to look over her shoulder. "My word—she is!" he agreed.

"Lovely—and full of fire—as she always was. Just a little older—naturally." Harriet went on commenting, studying the face before her. "But one wants her to be—and she's only the more interesting."

The photograph showed a face which might well challenge attention, being not merely that of a decidedly attractive young woman but of one whose intelligence and spirit were clearly to be counted upon. There was something unusual about the face; the eyes were those of a poet and dreamer, yet the mouth suggested a sense of humour, and the firmly rounded chin more than declared that its owner possessed will and energy in plenty. The poise of the head with its carefully ordered wealth of dark hair, the clear-cut curve of neck and shoulder, spoke of one who held an assured position. Altogether the somewhat prolonged contemplation which both brother and sister gave this presentment of one whom they had long known but had not seen much of late could hardly be wondered at. Nobody who had ever known Mary Fletcher could fail to be impressed at sight of this latest view of her; it showed what life is capable of building upon the foundation of a promising girlhood, such as Mark and Harriet remembered.

"I beg your pardon——" A pleasant, low voice spoke deprecatingly. "You didn't hear the knocker, and I ventured in. It's raining, and the wind blows right across your front porch."

Harriet sprang up, dropping the magazine. "Oh, do come in, Miss Sara. No, we didn't hear you—the wind's blowing so. Let me take your wraps."

It was the Fenns' next-door neighbour, Miss Sara Graham. She came in smiling, a slender, aristocratic little figure of a middle-aged woman, with a scarf of fine blue silk tied about her carefully arranged gray hair, a richly fur-lined cape slipping from her shoulders. Harriet took charge of cape and scarf, while Mark pushed the old armchair nearer the smoking logs in the narrow little fireplace, and gave a bracing poke to them which resulted in a freshly leaping blaze.

"I'm so very happy over some news of mine, I wanted to come over and share it with you." Miss Graham drew a letter from her little beaded handbag. "I knew you were always interested in my niece's plans, and this one seems to me very wonderful—for me, and I hope for her."

With Harriet in the spindle-backed desk chair, waiting with eager curiosity, and Mark leaning an elbow on the chimneypiece shelf as he stood on the hearth-rug, poker still in hand, the visitor read aloud a paragraph from the long typed letter of many sheets.

"'Somehow I'm bitten with the hungriest desire to get back to your blessed old home and your blessed young self.'—

"You know Mary's extravagant way of putting things," Miss Graham interpolated, with a deprecating little laugh.—

"'And I know of no place in the whole wide world where, it now seems to me, I can better pull my vagrant thoughts—and self—together, and make them do a respectable day's work. The book—the book I want to write—my first real book, after all these volatile short stories and the collections of them which don't really count as books at all, you know—that's all I can think of. And now that I'm back from France, somehow I can't seem to settle down here in the little old apartment, even with my dear Alexandra Warren. Girls and men are always dropping in, and there are theatres and supper parties without end—something everlastingly doing, and it's impossible to keep out of it, even on the plea of

work. Somehow it doesn't seem real life any more—though before I went across I thought it the *only* real life! I want to come back to that jolly big room you always gave me. Did you know I used to climb out from the west window, catch that long branch of the old larch, and swing down to the porch roof, from which it was only a long jump into the middle of your verbena bed?—No wonder you had so much ill luck with your verbenas, those summers!—And I want to sit on the old cross-stitch footstool with the bits of arms, almost *in* your big fireplace, in your adorable drawing-room with its old mahogany and its portraits, and its samplers in frames, and its cabinets of East India treasures——'"

Miss Graham broke off, glancing down the page. "The child goes into such raptures over my plain old home," she explained. "I'll find the place where she——"

"Oh, please don't leave out the raptures," Harriet begged, all the tired lines gone out of her pleasant face with the interest of listening. "We like to hear every word Mary ever wrote, you know. She writes so differently from other people, even in her letters. Why, we were just reading her last story, to-night, and talking of her." Harriet glanced at her brother and bit her lip, remembering suddenly what Mark had said—or hadn't said—but had implied, in criticism of Mary. "We haven't really seen anything of her since long before she went to France. It must be—why—all of four years."

"She says it's five." Miss Graham was still turning over the closely typed thin sheets, with their many dashes and the unconsciously consistent paragraphing of the trained writer. "It is three since her father and mother died, and she hadn't been here for two years, at least, before that."

There was no change of tone in her quietly natural allusion to the greatest tragedy of her own life. Mary Fletcher's father and mother—Mrs. Fletcher was Miss Graham's sister—had been killed together in a motor accident while travelling in Italy. Dr. Fletcher had been the distinguished head-

master at Stevenson, a famous private school for boys. It was from her girlish life in this school that Mary had come to spend her summers with her aunt in the near-by small college town. It had been her mother's home until her marriage, and so by every association it was natural that Mary should look upon it with affection.

"Oh, this is what I specially wanted you to hear," Miss Graham went on, her face brightening again. She read with a smile touching her delicate lips.

"'It seems to me, Aunt Sara, that if I could just live a perfectly simple, rational life with you, for one whole year—can you bear it to have me that long?—go to bed at ten o'clock—[I can't fancy it!] —have grapefruit and coffee and 'Liza's jolly little old graham rolls in the morning, go for long tramps, and perhaps—well—have Harriet Fenn and Professor Mark in, now and then, in the evenings, by way of dissipation'"—Harriet laughed out at this, and Mark grinned darkly, in the shadow above the fire—"'I could, perhaps, after a while, give myself to serious work. I never can do it here, now—that I'm sure of. I really can't describe to you how it has suddenly all palled upon me. For one whole year I don't want my flowers out of a florist's shop, I want to pick them in your garden.—May I come, may I—*may* I?'"

"When will she come?" Harriet asked, understanding that the matter was already settled. The light in Miss Graham's face told that. What must it not mean to her to anticipate having her quiet life enriched for a whole year by so delightful a companionship as that of this still youthful yet challengingly mature personality? Already Harriet could almost see Mary running out of the austerely dignified white house with its tall pillared porch to cross the lawn, leap the low hedge, and dash into the little brown house next door, full of some news or plan with which to startle her more staid neighbours. Or—would Mary conceivably have changed and be no longer a hedge-leaper? She had been through much en-

larging experience since the Fenns had known her; would she be somehow removed from them, even though, as her letter suggested, she should "have them in, now and then—by way of dissipation"? Just what did Mary mean by that? Was it a bit of a jeer at their quiet manner of life in the old college town? Harriet wondered.

"She gives me barely time to get her room in order," Miss Graham declared happily. "And the piano must be tuned—she stipulated that. She wants to know if you've kept up your practice on the 'cello"—Mark shook his head regretfully—"and says she must have music if she is to write. It all sounds as if she were precisely her old—what is the word used so much these days?—her old temperamental self——"

"Don't say it!" Mark fairly interrupted, a frown of impatience crossing his brow. "Of all modern excuses for intemperance and irrelevance—and general idiocy—that's the worst. An author of her class is old enough to stop being 'temperamental' in her work—and out of it—and become rational—in her work and out of it. I want to see her do it!"

Miss Graham stared up at him, not quite comprehending his ferocity, and a little hurt, though she was used to his abrupt statements, and knew well enough that his friendship for her and for Mary herself was not to be questioned.

"Don't mind him," Harriet said quickly, as Mark picked up the magazine which contained Mary's story. "He's rather a bear to-night. The week's work has been heavy." She shook her head warningly at her brother. But Miss Graham had recognized the magazine and was reminded of something in Mary's letter which she hadn't read to the Fenns.

"Oh," she said, "Mary spoke of that. Have you read it? I haven't—yet. She calls it—I think the word was—*'punk'!*" She spoke the unaccustomed syllable with a wry

little twist of her lips. "She said when I'd read it I should know why she needed a year with me. I'm sorry—I didn't suppose Mary would ever write anything unworthy!"

"She hasn't." Harriet was quick in defense. "I haven't read it myself, yet I know it isn't unworthy. Perhaps it isn't her best—all that she's capable of——"

Miss Graham looked up with almost pleading in her blue eyes at Mark, who had been standing with his arm upon the chimneypiece, below the portrait of his father. He had rather suddenly stiffened; the likeness to the face above stood out strikingly.

"If she knows it's punk," he said, in answer to her unspoken question, "and if she's coming off up here to get away from the temptation to keep on writing punk, there's hope for her. Get her here, as soon as you can—and—if you'll take my advice, don't coddle her too much. I'm not sure I should tune the piano for her!"

"Why, Mark!" Harriet was smiling, yet she was a little worried, lest he hurt the gentle lady for whom they both cared so much. "I think it would do you yourself good to get out the old 'cello and play with her. Only yesterday you were planning to take me in town for a concert. You said you were starved to hear some good music!"

"I certainly never used *that* word," denied her brother, evidently nettled, the colour rising a little in his cheek. "*Starved's* not a word of mine, thank the Lord! Mary uses it three times in one short story. Emotionalism—overemphasis—I've no use for 'em." He looked at Miss Graham, and his frowning brows smoothed somewhat. "I'm afraid I *am* a grouch to-night," he admitted. "It's really great news you bring us, neighbour, and we shall be glad to see your Mary again, be she never so scornful of our limitations."

"Scornful? I think she feels she *needs* limitations," said

Harriet Fenn, with one of the flashes of interpretation which sometimes surprised her brother. "She's been having so much, doing so much, experiencing so much; she wants to get away where it's quiet and she can think it over. How can one wonder! With all her success—so much praise—so much vogue; and then this last year and a half abroad, writing all those wonderful articles, in the midst of all the excitement and tension. No wonder she wants to—collect herself. And this is just the place! I'm so glad she's coming."

"I will tell her you say so." Miss Graham laid the sheets of the letter together, the flush on her cheeks deepening as she rose to go. "She really thinks very much of you both, I know. And you will be good for her. Do you know, at the bottom of it all, I think Mary is just a little tired? She wrote so much, worked so hard, all the while she was over there, she must need a real rest. It will give me great happiness to look after her. Independent as she is, I know she misses—her father and mother."

The little dignified speech, so like the finely bred, sweet-spirited woman who made it, brought Mark forward with a quick word of apology.

"Forgive me, so she does, Miss Sara. She shall have the best we can give her. Please tell her so, from me. I suspect the matter with me is that I'm jealous of that marvellous ability of hers—and jealous for it, too—that she shall do the thing she's capable of—and that she hasn't done—yet."

When Harriet had escorted her visitor to the door, and returned to the warm, homely room, with its uneven rows of books and its plain, comfortable furnishings, she regarded her brother reproachfully.

"How could you take away from her happiness by suggesting such a criticism of Mary? All writers are more or

less uneven—I've heard you say so many a time yourself. You know everything she writes is attractive, and I've no doubt this last thing is. I'm going to read it and find out."

"Go to it!" Mark slid the magazine across the desk at her. "Revel in the moonlight and the mush."

"Mark!—Mary never writes mush."

"She comes mighty near it, this time. But don't let me prejudice you."

"As if you hadn't done your best to! But I refuse to be prejudiced."

"Good old Harry—with her judicial mind."

Harriet turned her back upon him and began. She read the six pages at a rush, lingered over the illustrations, three out of the four of which represented the heroine with one or other of the five men by whom she was surrounded throughout the story; and finally laid the magazine down with suspicious quietness, to sit staring into the fire without a comment. Her brother, now smoking a well-coloured briarwood pipe, while he put in order a mass of papers at his desk, looked up at the slight creak of the old rocker in which Harriet sat.

"Well?" he demanded.

Harriet hesitated. Then she temporized. "I thought the description of Californian scenery—the atmosphere and colouring and all—was very vivid."

"It was."

"The characterizations were certainly good."

"One girl, five young men, and an Airedale dog, as I remember them. Also, a Chinese cook. I don't know but there was a chaperon, for propriety—a pale shade in lavender. There was, I admit, a bit of good character drawing of the Chinaman—and possibly of the dog. The others all looked about alike to me. I believe one was named Billy and one Jack."

"The story is certainly charming—and unusual," defended

Harriet, with the obstinacy her brother particularly enjoyed in her. "I can never get over admiring Mary's use of words. She flings them about so recklessly—she uses up so many striking phrases—and yet she never seems to run out or to say the same thing in the same way. It's all so fresh and facile. It's——"

"Keep on," encouraged her brother, grimly. "Say it all—it's all true. But that's precisely the trouble."

"What's precisely the trouble?"

"That she has so many tools in her workshop—that they're all sharpened to so fine an edge—all so fitted to her hand. And that she keeps on making with them—nothing but pretty toys."

"Oh, Mark! Think of her war work!"

"That was mighty good, certainly," he admitted. "It could hardly be otherwise. She was writing fact, not fiction, and she was keyed up to do her best work. She was stimulated to produce what her editors expected of her, truthful tales of what she saw and heard. The material was all at hand, she had only to use her discrimination. Every power she had was at her service. There was nothing distinctly creative about it; she would tell you herself that given her own ability she couldn't help writing as she did. But after all, she was only a reporter, of a very high class. In a way, the experience did injury to her creative faculty; she had such a wealth of material and inspiration at hand she had no need to use her imagination."

"I don't agree with you." Harriet shook her head decidedly. "Only a highly trained imagination could have seen what Mary saw."

"Granted, my dear. That's absolutely true. But at the same time this very story—the first, I judge, she's written since she came back—shows a certain poverty of conception, a certain reversion to the old type of gay and clever and

perfectly meaningless tale-telling for an idle hour, which—well—it gives me such a sense of disappointment that I can't get over it."

"I see you can't. For a man who's bought seven new books to-day, I think you're pretty pessimistic—I won't say pedantic. Miss Graham's probably right—Mary's tired. And she wanted the money, so she wrote this story and got it—the easiest way. Her prices must be enormous by now. What she earned by that alone will bring her here and pay expenses till she can rest up, and go at the work she really plans to do—and is capable of doing."

Though it was not yet time to do it by twenty-four hours, Harriet now wound the clock with firmness and decision. Mark, relaxing from his critical attitude, laughed and came across to pat her shoulder as she said good-night.

"You're a great little champion of the downtrodden author with a yearly income which makes yours and mine put together look like the widow's mite. And I hope you're right. Anyhow, it will be interesting to see what success—in the ordinary acceptation of the term—has done for the girl we used to know so well."

Left alone by the smouldering fire Mark absently picked up the magazine and absently turned the pages till he came to "And, Behold——" again. Then, by no means absently, he reread the closing paragraphs, and with a sudden gesture of distaste flung the unoffending copy of *The Centrepiece* into the fire.

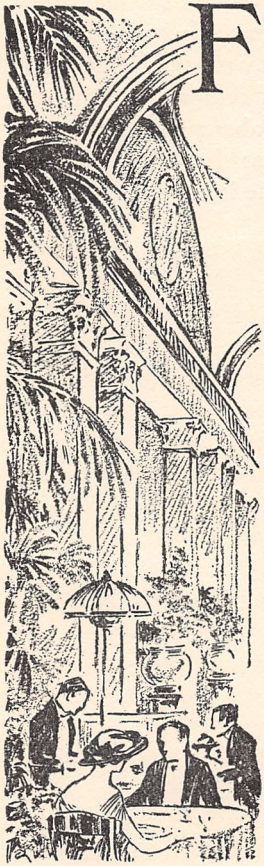
"If you're coming within my reach, Mary Fletcher," he said to himself, "I'll do my duty by you like a man and a brother. Somehow I have an idea this year will give you your only chance."

Then, as he watched the flames slowly surround the bulky pages, he all at once remembered something which he was destroying along with Mary's despised work. He snatched

the magazine from the fire, with some difficulty extinguished the smouldering singe along the edges, and finding the page which bore the reproduction of Mary's photograph, carefully tore it out. The remains of the magazine went back into the fire, but the picture received a second thorough scrutiny. Finally, the sheet which bore it went into Mark's lowest desk drawer. One might resolve to do one's whole duty, as a man and a brother, by a young woman who looked like that, but one needn't necessarily destroy so striking an image of her. Best retain it for purposes of comparison with the original. One cannot know too much about the subject one investigates. Besides—the picture, as Harriet had said, was really very lovely, and didn't in the least—like the story —deserve burning.

## CHAPTER II

### An Editor Prophesies



"FRANKLY," said John Kirkwood, irritation in his voice, "I don't like it."

"I'm very sorry to lose her," agreed Miss Alexandra Warren, heartily. "But I don't see that there's anything we can do about it. When Mary makes up her mind, it's not I who can unmake it. Neither—with all honour to your powers of persuasion, Mr. Kirkwood—can you, I'm thinking."

"In my opinion," continued Mr. Kirkwood, editor of a deservedly popular magazine, and very much accustomed to having his own way, "she will be making the mistake of her life, at a critical moment when she can least afford to make it. It's absurd—preposterous—that she should go off and bury herself in the country for a year, with the idea of producing anything worth while."

"Of course it isn't quite the country," objected Miss Warren, determined to do her friend full justice. "And it's a college town——"

"What college?"

"Newcomb—I believe."

"Who ever heard of it?" demanded Kirkwood.

"I asked Mary that," admitted Mary's friend. "She gave me a long list of distinguished names—all graduates."

"They became distinguished in spite of their college, not because of it, then," declared the editor, most unfairly, because of course he knew nothing about it. "And it *is* the country, since it's not New York, nor within hailing distance of it."

"Oh, how narrow you are!" Miss Warren regarded his face—his thin, tense face, with the evidences of hard work and late hours lined heavily beneath his dark eyes. "I'll wager you came from the country yourself. In fact, I know you did."

"I did, certainly. It's a mighty good place to come from —and to stay away from, after one's achieved the getting away. I don't advise anybody to go back to it, least of all Mary Fletcher. She's made a place for herself; she's been in the public eye with her war work. She has her great chance now, to make that name of hers stand out with a new significance. But if she takes that chance she's got to take it here." The editor's lean jaw stiffened; the frown between his eyes deepened. "This is the place for her to do that work—unless, of course, she intends to write a history of Newfane—what is it?—Newcomb College. In which case, I admit she'd better be on the ground."

"I don't think she has the least idea what it is she wants to write."

"She won't get her great idea walking along a country road. She won't get it at a village tea-party. She won't get it anywhere—except here, in the midst of life, where the big things happen, where the stimulating contacts are possible, where——"

The telephone bell in the pleasant little apartment rang almost in the speaker's ear. He turned with quick annoy-

ance, succeeded instantly by expectation, as he remembered from whom the call might be.

"Perhaps that's Mary." Miss Warren came over to the desk, from which Kirkwood removed his elbow to give her room. She sat down, a graceful figure, and listened with a smiling face to a rapid explanation which seemed to leave no room for expostulation.

"I see. . . . Yes, he's here. . . . I'll tell him. . . . Do you want to speak with him? . . . Wait a minute. . . . No—wait a minute, Mary, please!"

Miss Warren covered the transmitter with one hand while she said softly, "She's been detained downtown, can't get home for dinner—want s me to tell you she would be sorry if she had time to be anything except horribly rushed. She hasn't time to talk with you——"

Kirkwood seized the instrument from Miss Warren's hands, with a sort of growl by way of apology.

"Mary—" he began, "if you have to stay downtown—though why in the world . . . I beg your pardon, I know it's no affair of mine. . . . But if you *are* downtown, won't you let me come and take you to dinner? Please!"

Miss Warren sat back, much amused, as she watched the editor pass rapidly through the various stages of confidence, uneasiness, loss of hope, and final despair which were readily indicated by his spasmodic utterances into the telephone. When he finally hung up the receiver with an exasperated jerk she had no need to have him tell her—as he promptly did—that Mary Fletcher was probably the most unreasonable and impossible young woman in the whole city this night.

"You can hardly blame her," she reminded him, "for wanting to get away, if she's going at all, as quickly as possible. I never saw her so tired—in fact, I never saw her tired at all. She did work desperately hard over there, little as

she's said about it. And now, to get away, she must do all this shopping——"

"Shopping—to go to the country?"

Alexandra Warren laughed. "Why not? You know Mary herself says that if being a genius means looking dowdy and grubby, she prefers to stop short of genius and continue to be ready for the snapshot photographer—whom she can't possibly avoid, anyway, try as she may. And of course, though she snatched up a few pretty things before she sailed, she's really dependent on her tailor and her dressmaker here to put her in shape to go anywhere. That's where she is to-night, getting a last fitting—on a brown tweed suit that is positively the prettiest——"

"You don't expect me to believe," Kirkwood interrupted, "she's getting a fitting from any New York tailor at *this* hour!"

"Even so, though it's hard to believe. Mary can wheedle anybody into doing anything. She says the tailor came from the country originally, and is in great sympathy with her going back there. She says he says that his one ambition is to get enough money to stop tailoring and go and buy a farm. So he's much interested in——" She stopped to laugh at Kirkwood's face. "What a cynic you are!" she told him. "Don't you think *any* good can possibly come out of Nazareth? And do you expect a woman like Mary to walk the streets of a really fine old college town in the clothes she left behind when she went to France? She's given them all away, anyway."

Kirkwood got up, his tall figure unfolding itself not quite erectly, for his shoulders showed the effect of prolonged desk-work. He glowered down at Alexandra Warren as she looked up at him, a capable woman in the middle thirties, a librarian in one of the great city libraries, well dressed, alert, really attractive in a way which didn't specially interest him.

He knew her principally as Mary Fletcher's friend, who lived with her in this rather luxurious small apartment, and made it possible for him to come here now and then—when Mary would permit it, to "talk shop" with this one of his contributors who wouldn't give him half as much of her work as he wanted for his prosperous magazine.

"Well," he said, with a shrug of his thin shoulders, "if it's the clothes question which is chiefly absorbing our young friend, perhaps I needn't fear she'll take her visit to the country too seriously. You say she means to stay a year. I'll give her three months—no, I'll give her six, since spring and summer are pretty decent up that way. But let fall come, with the theatres and the concerts beginning, and the leaves dropping in the Park, the Palisades a mass of colour in the sunshine, and she'll come back—like a homing pigeon. Mark my words, by October she'll come back. And in November she'll begin the new book—in New York—the book she couldn't get in the country!"

He picked up his hat, his odd, half-cynical smile showing in the corners of his well-cut lips.

"I'm sorry you're so unhappy about it all," Alexandra said. "And of course you know Mary's truly sorry not to have kept her appointment."

"Oh, don't bother to say that," he told her. "If she'd really not wanted to miss the appointment she'd have cut the tailor and come home. I don't believe in that tailor at all, you know—I don't think she's been near one—not at this hour, anyhow. One excuse will do as well as another. We quarrelled violently the other evening over this plan of hers; she didn't even tell me when she's going. Perhaps you'll let me know that? I might at least have the satisfaction of sending her some flowers and magazines for the journey."

"Why, of course. She would want you to know. She goes to-morrow night, on the ten-five."

Kirkwood was frowning again. He was in a very bad humour indeed or he wouldn't have said what he did next. "The truth is, Miss Warren, you yourself are much to blame. If you'd taken a stand, said you couldn't be left alone, told her you needed her—— Oh, well, you're so provincial yourself, in spite of your years here—you couldn't be expected to see what a mistake she's making."

"Couldn't I?" Alexandra quite naturally stiffened a little at this accusation. "Mr. Kirkwood, if you had known Mary's earlier life, at the School, with her wonderful father as headmaster, and her beautiful mother making such an atmosphere of home for all those boys, you wouldn't wonder that the country—such country—calls her back pretty loudly now. The School, you know, is just by itself, a great settlement in a tiny village—oh, such a delightful place!"

"She isn't going back there."

"No, but Newcomb College is only twenty miles away. She plans to go over to the School, now and then. She's never been there, since Doctor and Mrs. Fletcher were brought back and buried—at Newcomb, in the old family plot. Miss Graham—Mrs. Fletcher's sister—still lives there. Why, it's all so natural, Mr. Kirkwood, that now, with the first edge off her sorrow, she should want to go back. I don't see how you——"

The editor had an unmannerly trick of interrupting people, particularly when they weren't saying anything he considered worth his time to listen to. He did it now, as he moved toward the door.

"All that's neither here nor there!" he snapped. "The thing that does matter is that she should destroy her chances for doing big, significant work by going off for a year, burning her bridges, getting out of touch with everything that could stimulate her, coming into contact with everything that can depress and chill her—I tell you it's a *crime!*"

He had told her this so many times that she hardly needed to have him state it again, but she listened in silence until he had said the last word, understanding that at the bottom of his irritation was undoubtedly a concern for more than Mary's art. He had never posed as other than a good friend and sharp critic, who considered that he had brought out the young writer in the beginning, had taught her much of her craft, and had reaped his reward in her striking, if more or less superficial, success of the following years. It was none the less easy for Alexandra to see that, whether he knew it or not, a large part of his disappointment over Mary's plans was caused by his sense of personal loss. Now that she was back in his world he wanted to keep her there; that was the truth of the matter.

Alexandra saw him depart at last with a decided sense of pity for him, though he was by no means the sort of person who often inspires pity. Mary owed him for much very tangible help in the beginning of her career—if it was to be a career, as it promised. She had been rather hard on him to-night, for no conceivable reason. She had seen more than ever of him since her return from France; and now to miss this final appointment with him seemed hardly fair.

Ten minutes after the editor had gone the door opened again, and was closed with a decided bang behind the subject of the last hour's discussion.

"Why, *Mary!*"

"Yes, I know. I met him—at the subway entrance. Such hard luck. Now—I'm going to dinner and a play with him—to keep the peace. Why didn't you get him off sooner?"

"My dear, you said you were staying downtown. But of course I might have known——"

"That I'd do the erratic thing? If I didn't you'd almost be disappointed, wouldn't you, Sandy?"

She looked like that—she looked exactly like that, Alexandra Warren thought—as if she would do the erratic thing. Just what it was about her that kept one watching her—as her friend watched her now—it is difficult to tell. The fact was that one did watch her, study her, enjoy her—even when she was most trying to one's sense of responsibility and judgment.

She stood for a minute on the hearth-rug, before one of those gas grates which pass for fireplaces in such apartments, resting her arms upon the chimneypiece and looking down at the play of small orange and blue flames. She had thrown a wide cape of brown beaver upon a chair, and stood, a slim figure in a brown tailored suit, a tight little brown hat edged with beaver pulled down over her hair. She was all brown, was Mary Fletcher, from her bronze-brown hair to her slim, high-arched feet. Even her face held tints of brown in its pallor—and the pallor was new. Before Mary went to France richly soft hues of rose had mingled with the slight duskiness of her brunette colouring; they were all gone now. Deep shadows lay beneath her eyes—yes, Mary was tired, no doubt of that. Even so nothing could quite subdue a certain amazing vitality in her.

"He said the tailor was a myth," said Alexander Warren. "I begin to think he is myself."

"No myth at all, as you very well know. I've just come from the fitting, quite as I said. I bribed him heavily to get in two in one day—and finish the suit by noon to-morrow. And it was quite true that I was staying downtown—only I meant to stay just long enough to let John Kirkwood get away. Oh—I don't want to go out with him to-night! But when I met him—my ridiculous heart failed me, he looked so miserable. I really do owe him for a lot, don't I? So I'm

going—on one condition—that he doesn't say one more word to me about my year at Newcomb."

"I doubt if you can hold him to that condition."

"I can—and will. He understands. One word—and I'll be lost to him.—Well, he'll be back in an hour. Shall I go as I am—or dress?"

"I think you'd better do him the honour of dressing, since it's the last time for a year. Besides, you'll enjoy the whole evening more."

"And feel less grubby. I do feel grubby—and look it. Here goes, then. Only it's a shame *I* can't have this last evening with you. Will you promise to wait up for me? You can have a cat-nap on the davvy—and we'll talk till morning."

"We'll do nothing of the sort. We can talk all day to-morrow, and you need the sleep. Don't bother about me—I've any number of letters to get off to-night."

Alexandra followed her friend into Mary's own room, went on into the tiny bathroom where she drew a full tub, and then, with the soft sound of splashing in her ears, got out the one semi-evening gown left provisionally out of the early packing and laid it, with its underlying accessories, on the bed.

She was rewarded presently by the feel of two cool, satiny arms about her neck, a fresh and fragrant cheek against her own face, and a low, revived voice in her ear.

"Oh, what doesn't a hot tub do for one? I'm all made over new—temporarily. If you'd just be angel enough to do my hair—No, that's selfish of me!"

"I want to do it. Sit down, and I'll play maid. You don't let me often enough—and somehow—to-night——"

"Yes, I know. You're feeling ridiculously soft toward me, because we're almost at the parting. It's probably a good thing I'm not to be here.—We should be a couple of

sentimental pussy cats, purring on each other's necks—and we'd both hate that."

Alexandra combed and brushed the heavy brown looks with care and skill, trying to forget that her heart was aching rather heavily. It had meant so much to her to live with Mary Fletcher for three crowded, interesting years—not counting the eighteen months of war service. Before that her own life had been dull enough—it would be dull again, now that she was to return to the suburban home from which she would come in every day for the hours in the library where she sat behind a desk. But there was nothing else to do. Nobody else would want her—there was nobody else she wanted. She would never forget the day when Mary Fletcher, standing with her among the bookstacks in a remote corner of the high-ceiled quiet place, had suddenly said with that convincing eagerness which people found so irresistible: "Oh, *would* you come and help me make home out of a little apartment? Somehow I *know* we'd get on! I've been *so* attracted by you for so long. Do you imagine you could stand living with me? It's a frightful test, you know!"

Stand living with that vital creature who, however exacting or trying she might prove to be, could never by any possibility be boring? The efficient librarian's life had long ago become such a monotonous round of daily routine she would have welcomed any prospect calculated to enliven it. She had never found occasion to regret the partnership thus formed. With all her varying moods and caprices, Mary had been eminently fair—as, for all her weariness, she was fair to-night.

"Thank you, Sandy dear, that's perfect. I don't let you maid me very often, do I? But it's a comfort to-night, I'm so fagged. Now for the frock—it's a pretty frock, isn't it? I wonder when I shall wear it again! At some staid college

festivity, I suppose, where I shall have to be as demure as a professor's wife."

The apartment bell rang—Miss Warren answered. She came back with a square florist's box, at sight of which Mary laughed relentingly.

"The sinner—he means to get under my guard to-night, doesn't he?—with his orchids and his dinners and plays."

She pinned on the delicate cluster, gave a last touch with a powder puff to throat and chin and the white flesh below before she thrust a scarf of tulle about her neck, and let Alexandra lay a graceful, fur-lined wrap about her shoulders.

"Good-night—and I'm all fresh and rested and ready to make the most of my last night in the Big Town, even if I didn't want to go. I rather do, now. But—I'm going to harden my heart, just the same!"

She left the lightest of caresses on her friend's cheek, when she went down, a few minutes later, in answer to a summons from the hall boy. From the window high above, Alexandra looked down at the waiting cab, and saw the two figures, one exaggeratedly tall and slim in top hat and long coat, the other but shoulder-high beside it, cross the walk and get in. She drew a long sigh of loneliness. After all, though she had wanted her to go, it was rather hard to have Mary away on this last evening.

It was quite another John Kirkwood than the one who had given vent to such bitter complaining an hour before, who drove away with Mary Fletcher in the taxi over the wintry streets. He had worked faster than she to accomplish it all and find time to dress as well, and he was exultant, though he tried not to show it overmuch. Also, he was fairly well content to live up to her decree, that he was not to mention the sore subject which had so nearly wrought division be-

tween them. He had now set his mind on making a farewell impression upon her memory which should return to her once and again, on the evenings of the months to come, when she would be trying to endure the monotony of the quiet college town.

He saw with triumph, as the evening advanced, that his skillful work was telling as, knowing Mary Fletcher pretty well, he had been sure it was bound to do. Throughout the dinner his companion had shown indications of courteously disguised indifference to his wiles, in spite of the care with which he had selected the place and ordered the tempting food. It was exactly the sort of thing she had been wont to enjoy—the elegance of the softly lighted room, the gaily alluring music, the varied metropolitan types of people all about. Yet he had felt that guard of hers well up, felt it in the entire absence of the usual sparkling flow of her talk; she was so quiet he could hardly think it was quite Mary who sat opposite him. Her appeal to him, however, was hardly the less on this account; rather did it interest and challenge him.

But later, at the end of the third act of a brilliant play, one he had counted upon to absorb and thrill her with the perfection of its art, both literary and histrionic, he looked down at her and saw more than a touch of that which he had hoped to bring to her expressive face. She hadn't been able to resist it—it had taken her off her feet. She still wanted not to let him see that she minded whether or not she saw or heard anything more like that for a year, but she couldn't wholly conceal it. And with a certain frank generosity of hers which he particularly liked, she wasn't willing to withhold the acknowledgment of appreciation which was certainly due.

"Oh, what craftsmanship!" she said. "That dialogue—was there ever anything so clever? The sheer genius of it—

it's so amazing that anybody can get way, way in to human thoughts and motives like that!"

"Isn't it? If ever the mirror was held up to Nature, he holds it—and doesn't miss a reflection. I always thought him by all odds the greatest playwright of them all, but he's outdone himself in this."

"And yet, it's all so simple—so without strain for effect. That climax—what could be quieter?"

"Nothing. Nor more tremendous."

"Oh, yes—tremendous. There's no other word. And of course the acting is perfect. What a joy it must be to have such lines to read."

"Do you know——" he began, looking down at his programme and turning its pages lightly, as if the moment hadn't come for which he had been playing and as if he weren't thinking very carefully how he should put the thing he wanted to say—"there have been places all along in this play—in the turn of a phrase here and there, the sudden unexpected force of a word—which reminded me inevitably of—you?"

"No!" She glanced at him skeptically. "Oh, no—of course not!"

"Yes." He spoke thoughtfully and gravely, as if the idea had only just occurred to him and he was turning it over and looking at it on both sides. "I didn't recognize it at first, the play of wit and wisdom was so swift I was left breathless. But after a time, I began to wonder why there was something so familiar, here and there, in the use of words—in the way of putting things. And then it came to me—it is Mary Fletcher, with the strokes a little heavier, the lines drawn with a bit of extra finish. Why shouldn't it be so? He's a master—you're not even a pupil of his. But—you might be. You have all the marks."

She was silent. He waited. He thought her breath came

a trifle more rapidly than before; the orchids seemed to stir and flutter below her breast. He didn't think it safe to look directly at her. After a minute, however, he did venture to add one more touch to his effort to reach her.

"I think—if you will let me say so—that you have the genius, too. And—may I remind you?—I've never said just that to you before."

A little laugh came then, and a quick thrust back.

"Oh, Mr. Kirkwood—*you're* the genius, to put such a thought into my head! It's absolutely untrue, but of course you know it will work and work in my brain, and be my undoing."

"It should be your making." He looked at her now, still gravely, refusing to answer her comprehending smile. She had seen through him, he realized that; yet—the strange thing about flattery is that it seldom fails of its mark, though it may seem to glance off quickly enough thereafter. "It should be your making," he repeated. "To have your ability shine so clearly that the type of it—the class—the amazingly high class—is instantly recognized by one who knows your work as I do—that should be a magnificent stimulus, and an absolutely justifiable one."

"You know perfectly that I could no more touch such work than I could—reach that electrolier above us."

"Not yet, perhaps—though I'm not so sure. And the current that makes that electrolier blaze so brilliantly is precisely the same sort as that which lights these small side lights over here. Run that current anywhere—it's bound to produce light. In your case—I don't think you half realize how high the voltage is."

"You shouldn't try to raise it—you might burn out the fuse," she said gaily, to hide the real stirring of the thing in her brain which it was impossible not to recognize when the stimulus was applied. It was not the first time she had

felt it in his company—he had a trick of applying that stimulus in a way which had many times produced the result he wished. How often, she remembered, he had been able to say the word, suggest the idea, which had brought forth in due time the will to work which must come before the most inventive mind can make its inventions live.

"Ah, I knew you'd shy away from such a suggestion," he said, in a disappointed tone. "I never knew anybody who so persistently refused to be rated where she belongs. Never mind. When you bring out your first real book, then —you will capture the audience I covet for you. The thing I'm anxious about——"

He looked down at her, at her bent head—a small, fine head, with adorable lines of profile and cheek. Her hands clasped in her lap were holding themselves still by force—he easily detected that.

"You've forbidden me to say one word on a certain subject," he went on slowly. "If you hold me to that——"

"I do."

"Then it's going to be difficult to say the other thing that engrosses my thought. It's about your work. Surely, on this last night we'll be together for so long, you'll let me talk a little more about that. You always have. Why should you put an embargo upon me now?—Please—be a little merciful. You really don't know how it hurts."

She glanced up, saw the tenseness of the lines about his mouth, and looked away again, seeming to hesitate.

"You haven't forgiven me—I've seen it plainly all the evening," he went on rapidly, lest at any moment he should catch the wink of the orchestra's signal light which would mean the raising of the curtain on the last act. "Won't you forget that last argument we had when I said so many hasty and excited things I didn't mean—at least, not as they sounded? I've meant to be a good friend to you—you know

that—always. Whatever you do—or forbid me—I can never be anything else."

"You have been a friend—I've never doubted that," she admitted. "I owe you more than I can ever pay back."

"You have paid it—a thousand times over. All I want now is to put into your mind the thought that—when you come to plan the book, even though you do it a long way from here—you can't quite leave John Kirkwood out of it. I think it's helped you, in the past, to talk things over with me. Won't you show that you forgive me for my blunders by promising me that when you begin actually to think out your new scheme for work, you'll—at least let me know? I can't tell you quite how unhappy I shall be if you won't."

She did not answer at once, and while she waited the signal he was dreading came, the curtain rose, and instantly she was lost to him in the magic spell put upon her by the scene across the footlights. He couldn't wholly follow her into that land of unreality, he was still so very anxious fully to make his peace with her. But he was sufficiently aware of the beauty and potency of the dramatic climax of the stage play to await hopefully its effect upon her. As he well knew, she was intensely susceptible to emotional suggestion, and if she were to fall at last into the mood he had believed the experience of the evening might bring upon her, she would for the time being become as clay in his hands.

The curtain fell. He put her cloak upon her, got into his own coat, and they moved up the aisle without speaking. He was somewhat baffled by her silence; she had kept her head turned away from him to the very door. Was it agitation? he wondered—and thought it must be so. It wasn't possible for Mary Fletcher, as he had known her, to resist that climax; it had been all that art could make it.

He glanced furtively again and again at that turned away profile as they made their slow progress from theatre door to

their cab, which was far down the line and had to be waited for. He thought, as he had thought many times before in such places, that among all the women about them, their attractions enhanced by every trick of dress and adornment, Mary Fletcher possessed something which set her apart. Far more beautiful women elbowed her on either side, priceless furs and costly wraps of all sorts made her more simple evening attire insignificant by contrast, her slender figure was dwarfed by many a gorgeous, towering creature who looked down upon her with supercilious eyes—yet—yes, there was something about her which made him supremely content to be there by her side, and to try as best he might to protect her from the pressure of the departing crowd. .

They were in their cab at last, and out of the block which always impedes traffic at a playhouse door.

"Well? Would you mind putting a poor editor and beseeching friend out of his misery?"

She spoke without looking at him. Her eyes were upon the flying lights outside the cab windows, but her voice was kind.

"Just what do you want me to say?"

"That the line holds. That's all I'll ask for—that is, I'll try to be satisfied with that."

"I don't throw over my friends for a misunderstanding, John Kirkwood. Of course the line holds."

There was a moment's silence, then Kirkwood laughed—a rather bitter little laugh.

"Man is never satisfied—but I'll try to be. I'd hoped that the evening and the play would——"

"I know," she said evenly. "You expected it to take me where I'm weakest, get hold of my imagination, and make me sorry that I'm going. Well, you may be content. It has taken hold of my imagination—that terribly dangerous imagination of mine that has such control of me. I went

as mad over that wonderful play as you could hope I would, was as crazy to do something like it—afar off—in my line as I could compass. I'm just as much afire with a perfectly futile longing to do a big, brilliant thing that would take everybody off his feet as I ever was in my life. The only difference is——"

He thought she was never going to find the ending to that sentence. "Yes?" he prompted her at last, with a glance at the number of the street they were passing in their flight uptown. "The only difference is——"

"It's that—for the first time in my history I've—lost confidence in myself. I'm going away—to find it."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Instantly he was his old insistent, professional self. "Why, you were never so equipped to do the big thing. You're merely tired—you've overworked. I'm really glad myself you're to have a rest. As soon as you've had it you'll be yourself again. Then—the fires will burn. And then—I want to be at hand to pour on the oil."

She looked round at him at last. There was only one block more to go. Her eyes were dark with unhappiness, but she smiled at him like her old self, as far as friendliness was concerned.

"When I find I need the oil—that you so well know how to pour—I'll send for you. I'm quite willing to admit I may find it hard to do without you. You've given me so much—I haven't been half grateful enough.—Thank you for a delightful evening—I'm so glad I gave in and let you take me.—There, have I made amends at all? You've no idea how hard it is for a woman to do that when she's been a bit unkind. I don't know *why* it is so hard!"

He held the hand she offered him close for a minute, then as she drew it away he said slowly: "I'm going to believe that generous speech makes it all right between us. Talk

of things being hard—please don't mind my saying that I never dreamed anything could be so hard as it is to let you go."

"I may come back—sometime," she said without turning her head toward him.

"I pray you will. If I didn't count on that——" He let the sentence end there, with a suppressed breath she couldn't fail to hear.

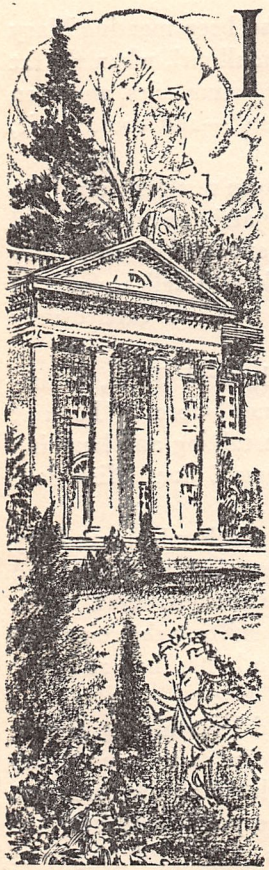
After that there were only a few words of leave-taking at the door of the elevator in the apartment-house lobby. As Mary Fletcher was borne upward she leaned against the side of the car, her head drooping like the flowers beneath her breast.

Inside her own door she laid that head for a moment upon the shoulder Alexandra Warren presented when she saw the shadows under her friend's eyes.

"Sandy," Mary said, with some difficulty, "I know now how the Lord felt when the devil led Him up to the top of the mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth. The only difference between Him and me is that He refused them knowing He could have them, and I—refuse them only because—I can't get them!—And so—I'm going to bed. At least, when one can't have the kingdoms of this earth, she can always go to bed. And just possibly—she'll sleep. I'm only afraid—she can't!"

## CHAPTER III

### A College Town



"I THINK, Bates," said Miss Graham, anxiously leaning forward to reach her driver on the front seat of the surrey, "we shall need to make a little haste."

"Yes, ma'am," Bates responded, touching his fur cap. "That train's liable to be late, though, Miss Graham."

Nevertheless, he sent the two well-groomed fat horses along at what was for them quite a spanking pace. Miss Graham had never cared to exchange her beloved chestnut horses for a motor car. The well kept equipage had none the less a certain distinction upon the streets of the college town, since it was known to come from "the old Graham place" with its tall white pillars and its air of old-time hospitality.

The surrey swung around into the station driveway, and came to a standstill behind the building. Miss Graham alighted promptly.

"I will go myself to meet her, Bates," she said. "I think the horses may be a little restive when the train comes in."

"Yes, ma'am—they may be, not having been to train much all winter. Miss Mary can hold 'em while I get her luggage—she'll be liking to, I'm thinking, if she's not changed."

"We shall find her much the same in such ways, I imagine, Bates. Indeed, she spoke of you and the horses in her last letter."

Bates glowed with pleasure. He had been meeting Mary at this same station since she was a small girl, when the fat old horses had been the shyest of lively young colts, and even then she had been wild to "hold them"—and could do it, too, after a little of Bates' training.

Miss Graham paced the station platform restlessly until the train came in, a pleasant figure for any arriving guest to find awaiting her. Her sensitive face, beneath the soft gray plumes of her becoming hat, was pink with delicate colour; her small form, wrapped in rich gray furs, was carried very erect.

"She's all the lady," thought the devoted Bates, watching her, as he had done a thousand times before. "Look at her now, beside all those other women talking and laughing so loud. She lives in a world by herself, does Miss Sara Graham—and belongs there."

The train came in. Bates, though his hands were busy with his horses, had one eye for the station platform, and presently saw a slim figure in brown run along it, saw a vivid, laughing face he well remembered, and shifting the reins into one hand touched his cap in answer to a happy hail as Mary Fletcher came close.

"Oh, Batesy!" A firm gloved hand gave his big gauntleted one a friendly grip—he had no chance to remove the covering, with the horses prancing a little as the train got under way again. "I'm so glad to see you! And here are Billy and Tom, looking as young as ever. I'd forgotten

horses could shine like that.—You don't mind my calling you Batesy still, do you? It's so like getting home to see you!"

"I'm glad to see you looking so well, Miss Mary. Mind? I'd be hurt if you didn't," grinned Bates. "Want to hold the horses, Miss Mary, while I get your things in?"

"Of course I want to." She was up in the front seat at the word, kept the horses in order, and when Bates came back with the small leather trunk, a typewriter in a pigskin case, and a big hamper of fruit from a city market, helped him stow them, making merry comment all the while and causing him to chuckle with amusement.

All the way up the village street her eager eyes were scanning the familiar landmarks, and when they passed the "green" upon which stood a certain white church with a tall spire, she leaned to look back at it till it was out of sight. Miss Graham understood. In that church Mary's father and mother had been married, and from it they had been borne to their burial. There was no gay talk from Mary's lips while the old horses trotted soberly by the old church. But when they were well past and were proceeding more slowly up the long hill, half way up which lay the Graham house, and upon whose summit stood the group of college buildings which overlooked the town, Mary's hand came upon her aunt's with a close pressure.

"I didn't know how I loved it all till I came back to it this time," she said, in a low, moved tone. "It's really more like home to me—now—than any other place in the world. . . . Oh, and there's the house! . . . How dear—how dear it looks!—just as it always did."

"We put on a coat of white paint each spring," said Miss Graham, "but it always seems to look a little dingy before the year comes round. White paint isn't what it used to be, I suppose."

"It doesn't look a bit dingy to me," Mary insisted, as the carriage turned in at the gravelled drive between two tall posts. The place was surrounded by a thick hedge, never allowed to grow high enough to shut it in. The house stood well back from the street. Bates was sending the horses along smartly now; it was his special pride to have the carriage sweep around the curve to the end of the long porch and stop with a hint of a flourish.

Dusk was descending, and several windows showed lights. The big front door swung open as Mary ran down the porch, and a stout figure in a black dress and white apron stood beaming in the doorway.

"Oh, Eliza—bless your heart!" Mary had both the housekeeper's hands in hers. "How good it is to see you! I didn't think everything *could* seem just the same. But it does, even to you. Why, you haven't a gray hair!"

"Indeed I have, Miss Mary. But you're looking just the same. I could think you were just the girl that used to come here—and ask for cookies before you got inside the door."

"You'll see I'm not—by many years, Eliza, though I like cookies just the same. Oh, this beautiful old hall! Aunt Sara,"—as Miss Graham with Bates and the luggage came in—"there never was another hall quite like this!"

She was all over the house in the next fifteen minutes, ending by standing in the doorway of the upstairs room which had always been hers, on all her visits, and looking in at it with contented eyes. Miss Graham had followed her about, enjoying her pleasure in the familiar scenes.

"It's all exactly the same," Mary exulted. "The old mahogany pieces, the white matting on the floor and the blue rugs and hangings, the desk-bookcase with—I'll wager—the very same books?" Miss Graham nodded. "And the lovely old blue-and-white English jugs and bowls on the

washstand.—Oh, but the lamp is new! How pretty it is. Why, it's electric! Have you wired the house, then?"

"Yes, I had to come to it," Miss Graham explained, smiling. "I was sorry for a while, but now I am glad, for it permits me to use several table lights in places where I could not before. Do you like this one, then? It seemed to me to fit the room—and you."

"It's exquisite, and the touch of rose gives just what was needed with all the blue-and-white.—Yes, in here, Bates, please, with all the things," and Mary had her key in the lock of the travelled-looking leather trunk by the time it was fairly in place.

For the following hour she was busy with the unpacking. So Miss Graham, sitting in a chintz-covered armchair by the big square table in the corner between two windows, found herself in a maze of interests. The most of Mary's belongings had preceded her, and this trunk had been devoted to the books, pictures, and special articles which she had wanted to keep with her till the last.

"They make home for me, anywhere, so how can they help but make a super-home, here?" Mary demanded, as she placed blue pottery book-ends on the table and filled them in with a long, crowded row of books. She set up photographs on the white chimneypiece beneath which glowed a small bedroom fire, and spread bureau silver and crystal jars upon the chaste white linen of the dressing-table.

"I always did love this long mirror, with the Mount Vernon picture in the upper panel," she said, pausing to look into it with a smile, which changed to the suggestion of a frown as she added— "and how I've changed since I used to sit and admire my brown curls. Aunt Sara, do you realize that I'm twenty-seven years old—all but a month? No girl any more."

"My dear—you don't look twenty-one!" Miss Graham exclaimed.

"Yes, but I do—begging your kind pardon. I did keep rather fresh for a long time, but I'm jaded now, no doubt about it."

"Child, you are tired. I've known it all along. You worked too hard over there. Just as soon as you are rested——"

But Mary had already left the painful subject of her years, and was burrowing in the trunk again, toward the bottom. In a moment she came to place two framed photographs on the table before Miss Graham, without speaking. The elder woman looked and looked again.

"How fortunate you are, dear, to have such pictures of them. I never saw these—I didn't know they existed."

"I found them among some snapshots I took of them myself, hunted out the films and had them enlarged. They're so much more satisfying than any portraits, don't you think?"

"Much more."

One of the pictures, of a goodly size, was of a middle-aged man of fine face and distinguished bearing, standing before a vine-clad wall, apparently absorbed in looking at some object not within range of the camera. One hand was thrust into his pocket, his eyes were intent, his mouth evidently ready to break into a smile.

"In the snap," explained Mary, "one of the boys was facing him, talking excitedly—his expression was absurd, with his mouth open, so I didn't like to leave him in. But father looks exactly as he always did when he was giving the other fellow a chance to explain but meant to come back at him with some keen speech which would show him where he stood. I thought it was by far the most typical moment that has been preserved. It makes a wonderful picture, doesn't it?"

"Oh, yes. It's better of him than this of your mother,

though this is really lovely. But it doesn't show her full face, and that disappoints me."

"I know—yet can't you see how the very next instant she will look up and say some sparkling thing that will make you delight in her? Mother's sense of humour was one of the most delicious things about her, wasn't it? Oh, how beautiful she——"

Mary's voice failed her for an instant, and she turned quickly away to hide it, quite as Mrs. Fletcher of the photograph would have done. She dove into the trunk again and brought up a long silk scarf of blended hues of violet and blue. Dropping it in Miss Graham's lap she gently took away the photographs.

"That's the prettiest scarf to be found in Paris," she said, triumphantly. "It looked so like you I pounced on it and all but took it away from a woman who was hesitating over it. In my very best manner I managed to convey to her a subtle suggestion that the pink-and-amber one she was also considering was by far the more becoming to her youth and beauty!"

The unpacking and bestowing was all done, after a time, and the trunk sent away. Then came dinner and a long, quiet evening by the fire in the drawing-room of which Mary had written so longingly. She had slipped into a little frock of dull blue, in which, Miss Graham thought, she looked a picture, with the firelight bringing back the old warm colour into her cheeks. It seemed just the Mary of five years ago who told stories of French life, with many a sparkling comment, or, when the tale was a pathetic one, gave to the telling that touch of the dramatic which was Mary's own.

When the grandfather's clock in the hall struck ten, however, she stood up and saluted snappily, with a clear "Yes, sir!" like one of the soldiers of whom she had been speaking. Then she proposed something so foreign to all Miss Graham's

habits that it quite startled the small person in the wing-chair.

"Aunt Sara, let's put on some big boots over our slippers and go out for a little walk. Will you? It's a nice night, and the fresh air will make us sleep. Besides—I want to see how the hill looks in the dark."

It *was* pleasant to get out of doors in the evening, Miss Graham was thinking happily, as she walked down the gravelled driveway with Mary's arm linked in hers and Mary's voice in her ear. The night was mild, a thin crescent moon hung in the west, there was more than a suggestion of coming spring in the air.

"I shall see the lilacs come out," exulted Mary, straining her eyes down the dark lawn toward a thick row of small trees near the hedge. "I never saw lilacs anywhere like yours."

"I have a new blue one—a very rare species, and it is really blue, and very beautiful among the purple and white. And there is one which is almost pink."

"And the tulips and daffodils—is Batesy as proud of those as ever? Oh, and does he still have the first crocuses of any?"

"Yes, always. He grows more and more proud of the garden. He wheedles me into getting new varieties every spring."

Mary was looking now toward certain lighted windows, just beyond the hedge, farther down the hill, where the driveway swept close.

"The Fenns live there still, of course?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes—I am very glad to say. I should hardly know how to live with any other neighbours in that house."

"Still teaching? Harriet in the high school and Mark in the college?"

"Just the same. They are very fine people, and the best

of neighbours. There is nobody in town whom I enjoy seeing more. They could hardly help being what they are, with Matthew Fenn for their father. Do you remember how fond your father was of him?"

"Of course I remember. It was strange that the two should have gone so nearly at the same time, wasn't it? They were so different—so exactly opposite in type one would hardly have thought they'd have found so much to like in each other.—Is that lighted front room below still the old study, crammed with books?"

"Yes—one can hardly turn about in it now, there are so many. And still Mark comes home with fresh armfuls. Harriet says it is his one dissipation."

"It seems a harmless one." The pair had turned into the street and were walking slowly past the Fenn house, down the hill. Mary's eyes were still scanning the windows through whose red curtains below the partially lowered shades the light glowed ruddily. "But he'll slowly fossilize among his books. Don't he and Harriet ever get away to the city, see a play or hear some music? Or do they just attend educational conferences and address meetings?"

Miss Graham found herself resenting a little the mocking tone, even though it came from lips so beloved.

"Mark Fenn will never become a fossil," she said quickly. "One feels, in contact with him, that he is—alive, that he is thinking things through. I know he is considered, in the college, one of the most able of the younger men. President Wing told me personally, not long ago, that his courses are leading all the rest in the matter of interest and accomplishment."

In the dim light Mary was smiling, understanding that she had touched a sensitive spot in her aunt's consciousness, and delighting in the little lady's warm defense.

"Good!" she said warmly. "I'm mighty glad to hear

it. Of course, you know, I shouldn't doubt for a moment that Mark would be a splendid teacher. It just seemed to me that he was still rather young to make books his only dissipation. Perhaps you didn't mean that literally. Just tell me that he and Harriet do go in town and riot a bit, now and then, and I shall be quite satisfied. If you can't say they do—well—I shall feel it my duty to stir them up, that's all."

"We all went in—"the nearest city was fifty miles away, but Newcomb's inhabitants all claimed it as their own—"only a fortnight ago, to a musical convention which lasted three days. It was a very great treat."

"Did Mark take some girl—at least part of the time? Do tell me he did!"

"He and Harriet and I went together," explained Miss Graham.

She couldn't see her niece's expressive face, but she could feel that Mary was laughing. "Oh, that *was* a riot!—Forgive me, dearest, but it's going to take me a few days to adjust myself. I've been living in such a rush of engagements, you know. Don't fear—I shan't be sighing for New York. I can't tell you how I love walking along this quiet street, looking at all the lights in the houses and thinking that inside are homes—real homes. Sometimes it's seemed as if there weren't any real homes in New York. I suppose there are, but the sense of them is lost, somehow. Here—why, each house looks like a family. You don't know how I've missed that—nor how glad I am to get back to it.—Hark, what's that?—Oh,"—she breathed it into Miss Graham's ear—"how long it is since I've heard college boys sing in the night!"

Coming back up the hill, by-and-by, when they had walked across the village green at the foot, past the white church, and so around a course of nearly a mile, they saw the door of the small brown house just below the large white-pillared

one open and close. As they came nearer, they discovered a figure tramping up and down the path from porch to street, hands clasped behind its back. The fragrance of tobacco smoke reached them as they came abreast, and as the figure turned at the porch again and came back down the path, Miss Graham spoke softly.

"Good-evening, Mark. Can you guess who is here with me?"

The slow pacing turned at once into a rapid advance. A pipe had its glowing ashes knocked out of it on a lifted heel and a voice said with a certain crisp inflection Mary Fletcher remembered well the minute she heard it again:

"I certainly can. Only one guest could make you sound like that. How do you do, Mary Fletcher? Welcome back to Newcomb!"

"Thank you, Mark Fenn. It's perfectly splendid to be here."

"I'm glad to hear that." His hand closed over hers sturdily. "We knew you came to-day, but didn't venture to make any sign. Harriet reported—through the window curtains—that you didn't even glance toward the little brown house as you drove in. So she thought you'd forgotten the people who live there."

"Shame on Harriet! She should have opened the window and shouted at me. I hope twenty-four hours more won't go by before you both come over."

"They shall not. I wish I could see how you're looking. But your voice sounds like the voice of Mary, and I can guess that you're smiling."

"I surely am. And I'm so happy to be here, I had to drag Aunt Sara out to look at the town with me. It's so beautifully the same I could have wept for joy."

"You didn't want to find it grown out of recognition, then?"

"Not a bit. I couldn't bear to hear that some new people live in the old Townsend house on the green. How dared they come in!"

"Up on the campus, however, we really have one fine new building. The architect cleverly planned it in keeping with the old timers, and you'll find it doesn't destroy the general harmony."

"Everything's all right then," admitted Mary. "It's the general harmony—the old-time atmosphere I want preserved, whatever else goes."

"Yes, I understand that authors are always looking for atmosphere. I hope you'll find it—quite as musty as you want it."

Genial though it was, Mary thought she recognized a certain dryness in his tone, which she remembered of old. Mark had always had a way of making her realize that she had been a trifle condescending.

"I'm no author now, I'm just a girl again, looking for the old landmarks in my beloved town," she hastened to assure him.

"Well, here's one before you, you see—or can't see. And like all landmarks, I'm a trifle weather-beaten, as you'll discover to-morrow night. But I think you'll find Harriet precisely the same person, in spite of her six years of teaching—in all kinds of winds and weather."

"Dear Harriet—give her my love and tell her I shall shriek at her from my bedroom window when she goes down the walk to start for school in the morning, just as I always did."

When they had reached the house Mary said she should be very much interested to see the Fenns by a revealing light, and Miss Graham replied that they were worth looking at by any light.

"Mark must be about thirty-five by now," Mary con-

sidered. "No great age—and his voice is rather nice, but I'm afraid he's pretty staid. Harriet's my age—but she's probably staid too. There's something about the professorial attitude—the habit of instructing—and disciplining—that gets left over after office hours. My blessed father was one of the few men who ever lived who managed never to acquire it. Aunt Sara—do you remember his laugh?"

"Yes, dear. No one could forget it."

When she was ready for bed, more than an hour later, Mary put out her light, raised her shades and laid her hand upon her window to open it. Before she did so, however, she stood for a minute looking across to the small brown house beyond the hedge. From the lower front windows she could still see the ruddy light shining out upon the porch floor and posts where dead vines clung, though the rest of the house was dark. All down the street lights were gone from most of the windows. The still town was all but asleep.

"Down where I came from," thought Mary, "they're just pouring out of the theatres, ready for supper and dancing. The lights are blinking in a million windows—nobody's thought of going to bed yet—except the old people and the babies. Up here a few college boys are grinding under a few desk lights, and one solitary professor sits up reading—Theocritus, most likely." The fancy amused her, and she decided to ask him, next evening when he came to call, whether he really had been reading Theocritus—or only correcting examination papers. She hoped it was the latter!

When the next evening came, she found herself making rather careful preparation for the expected guests, jibing the while at herself that already in the new and quiet life the visit of two village teachers could be an event to be looked forward to. The Mary of the old days had from season to season, beginning in her childhood, been accustomed to dash in and out of the brown house next door. In the later years,

however, she had seen less and less of the Fenns in her briefer and briefer stays with Aunt Sara. The last time she had been here she had only a distant and tragic recognition of Mark in black gloves acting as pall-bearer for Dr. Arthur Fletcher's casket as it was carried out of the white church on the green, and afterward of his bending over her to say a few grave words of sympathy and farewell. It was really at least seven years since she had seen either Mark or Harriet for more than a word of greeting.

She put on the dull-blue frock again, and the high-heeled slippers and stockings which matched it, oversaw the making of a small silver potful of chocolate and some tiny thin sandwiches, and arranged the lighting in the drawing-room to suit herself—an important matter. She found herself wishing for flowers—but there were no desirable flowers to be had, though she telephoned the small village greenhouse.

"That's a real lack," she said to herself. "I can't do without flowers—not possibly. I must have a box sent out once a week, at least till the garden blooms. Guests for the evening in a lovely old drawing-room like this—and no flowers!"

Then the Fenns arrived, and she forgot everything else in the interest of renewing old acquaintance. Harriet, with her smooth fair hair and pleasant, fresh-coloured face full of character seemed to Mary just what she had expected—the type of an energetic and successful village teacher. She was becomingly if somewhat austerely dressed, and her quiet, assured manner was much as Mary remembered it. Her clear blue eyes looked straight into Mary's, her firm hand took hold with almost the grip of a man's. Capable, clear-brained, independent, trustworthy—this was Harriet Fenn. Though she was actually younger by a year than Mary herself, she would have given any stranger the impression of being considerably older.

As for Mark, the instant Mary felt her hand in his and looked into his strong-featured, decidedly interesting face with its clear gray observant eyes she understood that here undoubtedly was a man whom she couldn't remember, or classify and dispose of quite as she had expected to do. All that could be said about him hadn't been said when one had declared that he was undoubtedly a good teacher, but that he was still too young to make books his only dissipation. He really didn't look as much like a fossil as she had been ready to believe. One thing was certain—her quite natural impression, carried over from the days when she had been a mere girl while he had reached young manhood, that he was already old and "staid," as she had characterized both the Fenns, was a mistake. He wasn't exactly an ancient crustacean yet; on the other hand, in spite of a certain gravity of face, broken rather rarely by an extremely winning smile showing splendid white teeth, he had, as Miss Graham had said, the look of being very much alive and to be reckoned with.

Mary herself, this night, as her friends regarded her, by the sheer suggestion of opposites might have been taken for no creature less imaginative than a poet. She was a study in artful colouring, in voice and manner, in the whole appeal of her personality. If she had been one of her own imaginary heroines she could hardly have filled the eye more satisfyingly. Just how much uncommon beauty of feature she possessed might have been questioned by some over-analytical judge of such matters, but certain it was that she somehow gave the impression of quite extraordinary loveliness, and of the distinction and magnetism which are even more attractive than beauty itself.

From the first moment of the encounter with the Fenns, Mary was on her mettle. Just what it was which suddenly rose up in her and made her eager to surprise and captivate

afresh these two people who had known her so long, she herself couldn't have told. Perhaps it was because her two quiet days and nights in the old house had already refreshed her; perhaps also it was because, to one for whom every hour had been full, those two quiet days had already begun to make her long for diversion. Certain it was that throughout that evening Mary sparkled as only Mary could when she was in the mood. Sitting close by the fire, on that little mahogany-armed, cross-stitch-embroidered footstool of which she had written to Miss Graham, she held all eyes. Now deliciously gay and piquant, now sobering to thoughtfulness as some subject came uppermost which demanded serious consideration, again seeming to listen with an eager concentration to the remarks of others, whatever she did or said—or however silent she was—all through it she was delightful to watch.

Altogether, Mary Fletcher that evening was the Mary Fletcher who, when in the same fettle, was accustomed to pour into her work the peculiar quality of enchantment which brought her back the enthusiastic approval of her editors and her public. Perhaps there is no better way to indicate the charm of her actual presence in such an hour than to say that it reminded one irresistibly of that other and allied charm of her work, whose market value had risen to such a high figure. Mary's own personal market value, to put it in sordid terms, was fully as high as that of her work; one found her companionship quite as entertaining and absorbing as any tale she had ever put upon paper.

Conversation and chocolate, firelight and Mary Fletcher—the evening passed swiftly for the guests. Just before it was over a clap of the knocker sent Mary herself to the door—Miss Graham required no service from any member of her quiet household in the evening. A huge florist's box with a special delivery tag upon it had been sent from the post office.

Mary brought it in. She knew well enough from whom it must have come.

"Flowers!" exclaimed Harriet. Her tone was eloquent of previous denial.

Great masses of yellow jonquils and pink tulips were disclosed, hardly touched in their careful packing by hint of fatigue after their journey. With swift fingers Mary sorted them, laying all that both hands could hold in Harriet's lap. To Mark she held out one small cluster of jonquils.

"Would you deign to soften the austerity of your scholarly desk with these?" she asked.

"Do you think the giver would be pleased to have any austerity of mine softened by his gift?" he replied, with that somewhat rare smile which she hadn't been able to bring to his lips as often that evening as she had expected. She had remembered of old that Mark Fenn wasn't a smiling man; there always had to be a real reason for his laughter, though when it was fairly won it was apt to be of the heartiest. Only once or twice throughout the evening, though he had watched her closely, had she heard that really gratifying laugh of his ring out. Its absence had slightly piqued her.

"Oh, he's a generous person," she answered. "It's one of my editors. He's so sure I'm going to find it unbearably dismal up here in the country, as he calls it, he feels it his duty to enliven the scene for me. If his flowers can enliven my friends also, he will indirectly accomplish his object. So isn't it logical that I should give some to you—since I myself can't do it alone?"

"Can't do what, please?—Enliven us?"

"You—in particular. Harriet gives me back smiles for all my little jests—you alarm me by your grave looks. Did you disapprove of 'And, Behold——' so seriously, Professor Mark?"

"How do you know I've read it?"

She laughed. "Guessed it by the way you've avoided the subject all evening. In my early days you used to be so ready to encourage me. Don't you think I need encouragement now?"

"Not along those lines."

"No? Why not?"

"You don't think so, yourself."

"Oh, indeed! Why, I thought it great stuff!" Her tone was the mocking one she often used with much effectiveness. Her eyes were sending shafts of challenge into his.

"No—pardon me—you didn't. But—do you think we'd better discuss it? I should probably say something rude, and that would be a poor way to begin to be neighbourly. You're gone away beyond my tutoring, these days, Mary, you know; you're a law unto yourself. I'm merely a backwoods teacher—no critic worth your considering."

"Oh, what humility! The only difference between days past and these is that—I used to be dreadfully afraid of you and your opinion. And now—while I still care what you think of my work, I'm no longer afraid of you. So—instead of listening in meekness to your words of wisdom, as I used to do, I should now probably——"

"You would probably come back with a defense that would make me wish I'd taken no shots at you."

"I'm not sure I should make any defense. What I should do would be—more likely—to attack."

"Would you? That's interesting. On what ground?"

"I'll tell you, some day. As you say, we mustn't begin by being rude to each other to-night. But—if you've something against me for being guilty of 'And, Behold——' I've something against you for——No, I will *not* tell you to-night, Mark Fenn. But it's a real count. Some day—we'll have it out, I promise you!"

## CHAPTER IV

### The Pursuit of an Idea

"AUNT SARA, I'm going to work."

"So soon, Mary? I thought you meant to do nothing but rest, for the first three months at least."

"It's no use. The more I do nothing the less fit I am. The only thing for me is to get at something. It's always been so—it always will be."

"Have you a plan for your work?" Miss Graham asked, rather doubtfully.

She sat at her desk, writing letters, a pleasant figure to look at, as always. She spent a good deal of time in correspondence with old friends. Several of these had been sadly neglected since Mary came, there had been so many engagements. Every day or two somebody had invited Miss Graham and her niece to tea or luncheon; there had even been a number of dinners in her honour, quiet affairs, after the fashion of the quiet college town. Miss Graham herself had "entertained" twice for Mary. It had been a long time since so much had happened in and about the old house.

"Not a shadow of a plan," Mary responded, cheerfully. She sat upon the edge of a mahogany centre table, swinging a russet-shod foot. Her kilted brown-and-white-striped skirt, her rakish little brown hat pulled well down over her hair, proclaimed her intent to go for a long tramp. "But I'll get one. Not to-day, probably—nor to-morrow. But there's no way to begin except to begin. Unless one's a genius—which I'm not—one can wait till doomsday for the thing that's called inspiration—it'll never come. I've got to go out after it, looking up every cross road, behind every tree—chasing up every rabbit track—till at last I see a vague form emerging from somewhere, in the dim distance. I'll dash after it—shouting madly to it to stop. But it won't stop; it'll go trailing away through the woods, only showing me a glimpse of itself from time to time, while I follow along, getting more tired and more out of breath all the way. This will keep up for days, more than likely. Finally, some wonderful hour, I'll be plodding along, almost out of hope ever to see the thing I'm following, when—suddenly—the figure will turn, stop, wait—and I'll rush up to it, panting. I'll see it growing clearer and clearer as I come near—a form—a face—an outstretched hand——"

Miss Graham was watching her niece in wonder. Mary's attitude, the expression on her face, spoke eloquently of something of which the elder woman knew nothing.

"Even yet," said Mary softly, "she won't show me more than the mere outlines of herself, and before I've done more than fling myself at her to embrace her, crying, 'Here you are! —I knew I'd find you!' she'll be gone again—behind the trees. But I'll have seen her! And from that moment, I'll know I can find her again if only I'm willing to trudge and drudge and toil. And from that moment I'll be glad I'm alive, and that in my brain somehow is the power to—to—make that vision real. Oh, there'll be days when I'll almost think I've

lost her again, forgotten even how she looked—but—just when I'm most despairing she'll appear to me once more —and she'll have grown so big and splendid that I can only fall on my face before her, crying, 'Oh, I'm not fit to try to tell them about you—I never, never can do it! But—it's the joy of my life to try!'"

Mary looked down at Miss Graham. She slid off the table, laughing and pulling the little brown hat farther over her eyes, as if in shame.

"I sound like a tipsy fool, don't I?" she said, raggedly. "And all about some silly tale like 'And, Behold——!'—I'll admit there was nothing in that. The vision I had wasn't as big as I thought it. The work I did in France was ten times better. But—I'm going to do something now that will redeem me in your eyes—and certain other people's. So now I'm off, on the beginning of the hunt. I've asked Eliza to put up some sandwiches for me, and I won't be back for lunch. You'll get used to me after a little. It's Mary the idler you've had visiting you so far. It's Mary the worker you're going to have now, with a pickaxe and a spade on her shoulder, looking for a job!—Never mind my mixed metaphors—they'll be worse mixed before I'm through. Workman digging, hunter hunting, spinner spinning—it's all the same. You can't cook your hare till you catch it—and there's another for luck!"

She left an airy kiss on Miss Graham's cheek, slipped out through the kitchen where she picked up her sandwiches, stowing them in a leather bag with a strap like a lawyer's brief-case, which she slung over her shoulder—it already held notebook and fountain pen—and swung away down the drive.

It was just a week after this brave start, a week each morning of which saw Mary setting forth again upon her quest, each afternoon returning with a sober face which

smiled when it met Miss Graham's questioning look. The morning mail of that eighth day, heavy as it always was with letters from both friends and strangers, brought one letter which Mary read twice over on her way along the road.

DEAR MARY FLETCHER:

Two months have gone by and I have kept my promise. Not a word from me has broken in upon the solitude with which it was your purpose to surround yourself. What other sounds may have reached you from that bothersome outer world which you have renounced I know not, but certain it is that no shoutings from my sanctum can be branded as intruders. Have I earned at least your tolerance for this first signal of my continued existence?

You told me of your purpose to rest for fully three months before so much as turning your thoughts toward work. But somehow I know that already you are of a will to break this vow. The tea parties have begun to pall, the weekly—I had all but written weakly—college lectures to which the general public is invited have lost their zest—if they ever had any; the quiet of the place is beginning to get upon your nerves—those delicately strung nerves upon which your whole future depends. In a word—you long to be at it.

Have you a theme? I wonder. In your walks up and down the lanes and between the hedges, have you encountered the thing you seek—the Great Idea—the Big Motive? Not yet, you answer impatiently. What is the man thinking of—that he asks that question so soon. Of course you haven't! No—of course not.

Well, June must be coming on gloriously up your way. Must I keep away indefinitely? This is the question which disturbs my peace of mind. If I come with no hint about me of wishing to speed up your processes of thought, only as a friend who misses you very much and would be glad to set eyes upon you again—How about it? I rather like June in the country myself. May I have a glimpse of it—in your company?

Faithfully yours—always

JOHN KIRKWOOD.

Mary pulled out fountain pen and writing tablet, and sitting upon a log in the depths of her wood, replied to this letter even before she ate her lunch.

DEAR JOHN KIRKWOOD:

I'm sorry not to share this particular portion of the countryside with you—or anybody—at this time. But June can be found anywhere, you know—and in other places you wouldn't be disturbing my train of thought. To be frank, I'm just getting at my work, and if you—or anybody—should come, it would most certainly distract my mind. I hate to seem ungracious, but——

In this vein she finished the letter. Six hours later, arriving at the house, she found a telegram awaiting her.

Unexpectedly summoned your way. Having received no prohibition in reply to letter am venturing to call this evening. Hope for clemency.

KIRKWOOD.

Mary ran to her room. She had passed the post-office on her way home and had not mailed the letter she had written in the woods. The day had been delightful, as far as her enjoyment of it in the open could make it so, but it had been productive of no smallest germ of an idea for her future use. She had told herself all the way along the road home that she would mail the letter and settle the question of the editor's coming, for the present; yet this eighth futile day of seeking had somehow weakened her resolution just enough to make her decide to leave the letter upon the hall table and let it go out when the postman made the morning delivery and collection. It was impossible not to remember how often Kirkwood's presence had quickened the workings of her mind even without concrete discussion of her plans. Yet the actual news of his coming made her angry with him, that he had not waited for permission.

"He's abominably sure that I need him—and want him," she told herself. "He knows perfectly that I haven't had time to answer his letter, and that I should have told him not to come. He shall be properly punished for his intrigue—

for that's what it is. I'll not even change to another frock for him—and *that* ought to show him!"

Down upon the porch, by and by, she awaited him, sitting on the step talking with Aunt Sara, who, herself in silk and lace, presently expressed a mild surprise.

"You look as if you were just starting off for another walk, my dear," she said. "Suppose someone comes to call."

Mary stuck her hands in the pockets of her brown coat.

"From this time on, Aunt Sara," she remarked, "I'm afraid you must expect me to behave most improperly. Up to now, I've been dressing for dinner and going to teas and doing everything that I should. But now—I've begun to work. And when I've been off tramping and come home tired and without a brain in the world, I'm to be exempt from rules. I warn you that if, as we sit here, I should see figures of callers approaching, and should be inspired to slip off among the shrubbery and evade them, you mustn't show agitation. You must say casually, 'I'm so sorry my niece isn't in'—and let it go at that."

"I will try," agreed Miss Graham, after a moment's pondering over the ethics of such duplicity, "to shield you as best I can, when you really do not care to see callers. Do you wish me to warn you—there is a man coming up the walk.—I fear it is too late to——"

It was quite too late—and Mary knew that she didn't wholly wish to escape. She rose, and with one hand still in the pocket of her coat, gave the other to Mr. John Kirkwood. Her welcoming smile, through the May twilight, was carefully tempered by an edge of displeasure.

"Shall I go away again?" he inquired, his own smile, however, showing confidence. "I'd have waited for an answer to my wire, if there'd been time."

"Are you sure of that?"

"You distrust me. I can show evidence that I really had

to see personally a most difficult and evasive author, within fifty miles. You couldn't expect me to let slip a chance like that—could you?"

When Miss Graham had left them, after a decent interval during which Mr. Kirkwood had done his best to make upon Mary's aunt the impression he wished—and had quite evidently succeeded—he and Mary came to grips with the situation.

"You have a most useful imagination," Mary said, her chin in her cupped hands, her elbows on her knees, as she sat on the step of the white-pillared porch and looked away from the figure beside her. "Doesn't that imagination help you to understand that you break the spell? Here I've been spending two months trying to get away from all suggestion of the old electrified atmosphere, the old high tension conditions—and you bring it all back as surely as the fragrance of Aunt Sara's box borders brings back the days of my childhood."

"That seems a not too severe analogy—rather a pleasant one," was Kirkwood's comment. "If I do nothing worse than that——"

"But you do. It's not a severe enough analogy. It's as if I were sitting on a quiet bank in the woods, and a brass band went by!"

"Great guns!—If that's the effect of me I must do something to tone myself down. And here I've been thinking myself the most subdued and toneless of sober workers. What have I said, since I came, that has been of the brass-band order?"

"Nothing. Your talk with Aunt Sara was the perfection of intelligent adaptation. You haven't mentioned your office —or your contributors, or anything calculated to stir me up. And yet—you inevitably recall to me the Big Town and all the world I know so well and want to escape."

"I'm sorry," he said, with amusement politely suppressed. "I'd no idea it was as bad as that. Why didn't you try a convent? The walls are thicker—and I should have had to get permission from the Mother Superior."

She made an impatient movement. "Oh, *can't* you understand?" she urged, a distinct edge upon her low voice. "Something queer has happened to me. It happened before I came away—or I shouldn't have come. I don't know what it is myself. All I know is that I had to get away. I may not be able to do anything here, but at least——"

There was a silence of a full minute. Then Kirkwood spoke very quietly. "At least I understand myself forbidden to talk about your work. If it were not so I might be able to say something to help you. I think I know what's the matter."

Mary shook her head. "No—I don't want you to talk about it. I don't want it analyzed. I couldn't *bear* to discuss it. I've got to fight the thing through alone."

"Very well. Only let me say once more that if the time comes when you're tired of fighting it through alone, you'll let a fellow combatant direct a straightforward blow or two at your imaginary antagonist.—And now—if you can bear to hear me talk at all—I'd like to tell you a tale or two. Or—if you're too tired to see me at all to-night, I'll go back to my hotel and come again in the morning."

Mary rose promptly. "I think that would be best," she agreed. "I know I seem like a bear myself, but I admit I'm frightfully tired to-night, and—if you would come in the morning instead——"

"Of course." Kirkwood shook hands in an entirely friendly manner, as if such dismissal at almost the beginning of a call one had come many miles to make were entirely rational and kind. "Morning puts a brighter light on most troubles—and all moods."

"You forgive me?"

"Certainly."

Mary watched the tall figure stride away down the gravel path, uncomfortably aware that she had been inexcusably ungracious, yet relieved at her present release. Next morning, however, she woke to find herself looking forward to the editor's return with actual eagerness. She had been absurd last night—feminine, all but hysterical in her unreasonableness. John Kirkwood was a good friend; it was more than possible that a straight, sane talk with him would relieve the tension of the past week's failure to think things out, even though the two did not technically discuss plans for work. Anyhow, she would meet him with amiability and let him remain long enough to satisfy all demands of courtesy. It was even possible that she might permit him to go with her for an hour's tramp upon which he could light the pipe he always carried in his pocket, and pace along the road, puffing cheerfully and talking entertainingly, after the fashion she well remembered. She had many memories of such walks, along the upper reaches of the Drive, or through the winding by-ways of the Park. None could be better company, of that she was quite sure.

She came downstairs early, looking fresh and fine, with every chestnut hair in place, blue linen replacing the brown jersey of the past week. She found at her plate a note, written upon the stationery of The College Inn.

On second thought I have decided not to bother you with a morning call, since I should be breaking in upon your best working hours. I need hardly say that I am disappointed, but of course that doesn't count with me at all against your fitness for work. I promise not to come again until you summon me—if I find myself able to keep such promise in spite of my honest conviction that I could help. But I understand that I can't make a nuisance of myself at the

present stage of your experience without prejudicing you hopelessly against ever calling upon me. Therefore, in perfectly good temper —in spite of the aforementioned keen regret—I take myself off, only asking from you the recognition that here is one whose imagination does put him clearly in your place—or he would most certainly not be writing this note instead of walking up the hill to find you at the top.

Well! She had what she wanted. What more could she ask of a friend than the rare ability to see when his absence is more welcome and more helpful than his presence? Now she was free again to go off upon the ninth day of her quest for that elusive vision of which she had talked so gaily to Miss Graham, with no smoke from a nearby pipe to obscure the dim wraith of which she was in pursuit. Nine days—what were nine days? Well might she look nine months for the thing she sought, if so be in the end she found it. But, the trouble was that this inability to see some sort of light, though it were only a rush light, was new in Mary's experience. Always before had her active brain leaped at its task, eager to be used, ready to present to her any number of ideas for consideration, her part only to pick and choose. But now—now—that brain seemed numb—dumb—worthless.—And she had refused the very stimulus which so often before had set it spinning!

But she did not summon Kirkwood back, though at the hour his note reached her she knew she could have intercepted him at the railway station. Instead she returned doggedly to her effort. She had not known before how persistent she could be in the face of discouragement—indeed she had hardly known discouragement before. She knew it now, and with each succeeding day her sense of something having "happened" to her, she knew not what, became more real.

On a June evening, idling up the path to the house, Mary heard the notes of a violoncello, coming from no great distance. She paused, listening eagerly. Yes—the strains proceeded from the open window of Mark Fenn's study. She crossed the lawn, leaped over the low hedge, and walking up to the window stood still below it. The slow, careful tones were sure ones—the air played, a famous old strain from a great composer.

Mary had not seen much of the Fenns since her arrival, two months earlier. Before coming to town she had expected to meet them often, but now that she was here somehow actual communication seemed slow to be established. Occasional brief visits with Harriet across the box borders of the garden, or now and then a short encounter with her brother as they met upon the street—these were hardly to be regarded as the signs of warm friendliness between the two households. Miss Graham's suggestions that she and Mary "run over" to the Fenns' upon a spring evening, or invite their neighbours to dinner upon a Sunday afternoon, had usually been met by a counter suggestion that the call or the invitation be postponed to a more convenient season—Mary was deep in a book—or she was expecting to go elsewhere presently—or the Fenns were probably busy, or tired.

"Don't you care to see much of our neighbours, Mary dear?" had been Miss Graham's puzzled question, upon one of these occasions. "I thought you liked them—as I do."

"Of course I do." Mary had looked up, with a casual air, from a book in which she seemed absorbed. "But—well—they seem rather prosier than I'd expected. Living all one's days in a small town, teaching the same things, year in, year out, certainly does tend to make one narrow, doesn't it?"

"Narrow? I should hardly call the Fenns that, Mary." Miss Graham looked slightly displeased.

"I enjoy people who strike sparks, now and then," Mary

explained. "People who scintillate—corruscate—startle one with the unexpected. I don't want to know what a man is going to say before he says it. I don't want a woman to be—oh, of course I'll shock you, Aunt Sara—but I don't want a woman to be so terribly conventional that she'll never make you sit up and look at her because she's said something you didn't expect her to!"

"My dear! What *can* you mean?"

Mary had thrown her book upon the table with a gesture of impatience. "Of course I seem to mean something awful—from your point of view, dear saint. I don't, at all. But—if you could know some of the people I've known—men who are never, never dull, no matter what they talk about—women who fairly sparkle with fresh and vivid ideas about things—you'd see what I mean. Well—we went to a college dinner last night, didn't we? Was ever anything so stupid? I sat between Professor Dry-as-Dust and Miss Prim-and-Proper. Wise as Solon—good as St. Cecilia—and oh, so boring, I nearly died of my suppressed yawns."

"You were unfortunate." Miss Graham's voice had a little edge upon its usual gentleness. "There were certainly people at that table who are distinguished—delightful. Doctor Edgeworth—Professor Marner—Mrs. Grant——"

"Yes, I know. Forgive me. They were eminently worth while—and I know if I'd been so lucky as to sit next them I could never have kept up my end. But it really isn't that sort of brilliancy I'm craving—it's another and quite different sort. Never mind, dear. I know I'm impossible. I'm truly having a beautiful time here, and it's only now and then I miss—the thing I can't describe. Only—the Fenns haven't got it, nice as they are, and I don't care to be really intimate with them. But I'll go to see them—to-morrow night, if you like!"

Mary got up and came around the centre table, upon oppo-

site sides of which the two had been reading. She dropped upon her knees before her aunt's slender figure and looked up with beseeching eyes. The smile Miss Graham never found it easy to resist flashed at her from Mary's lips, then those lips grew sober.

"You know," Mary said whimsically, "in this sober town sometimes I feel a little like a frivolous young windmill, set among a group of statues in a garden. Whichever way I turn I see something imposing to look at, but so substantial—so unchangeable—so impossible-to-be-swayed-by-the-passing-winds—like me—that sometimes I find myself longing to throw a brickbat at some learned lady or studious gentleman on a pedestal, and smash their classic profiles into dust! Yet —being only a windmill, I can't throw a thing!"

With Mary for a companion, poor Miss Sara had had to become accustomed to this sort of unreasonable tirade, yet found compensation in the girl's other moods, which were full of appreciation and contrition. But the lack of special interest in the neighbours next door seemed to persist, until all at once, on this June evening, came a sudden revival.

Having stood beneath the Fenn window for full five minutes, listening to an air which seemed to express a feeling not unlike her own at the hour, Mary stole to the open front door, entered without knocking, and came to a standstill at the door of the study. Within she saw Mark Fenn, coat off, drawing the bow across the strings of the instrument held between his knees, his thick locks thrust back from his forehead, his eyes intent upon a sheet of music propped precariously against a chair back. The desk light was canted to throw its rays upon the score; the doorway was thus left in shadow, and the performer had no knowledge of his audience until, finishing the page, he leaned forward to turn it over, and a voice spoke.

"Why not come across the lawn and let me play the accompaniment to that? It's a great theme, isn't it?"

Mark looked up, in astonishment. It was the Mary Fletcher he used to know, for the moment, who smiled at him from the doorway—not the amazingly difficult young woman with whom he had not been able to get on, of late. He smiled back, it was so good to see her like this.

"Come on over and play," she challenged him, in the voice of a small girl. "We've got a piano at our house, and maybe we can have some little cakes with icing on I saw in the pantry —if nobody catches us."

"All right, I'll play with you if I can have some of the cakes Eliza makes."

"How do you come to be playing the 'cello to-night? I haven't heard a note of it since I came, and thought you didn't care for it any more."

"I still care, but haven't time to keep up practice. Once in a while I get it out—and wonder why I don't do it oftener."

They crossed the lawn together. Mary lighted the drawing-room and looked over the musical scores Mark had brought. In ten minutes the two were off, playing away together and producing an effect by no means unworthy. At the end of the Händel *Largo* Mark lifted his bow with an air of satisfaction.

"That went fairly well for a first attempt," he said. "About the tenth time we played it together we might get something out of it the composer meant to put there."

"Good gracious!" Mary cried. "I thought we got something out of it *this* time! Art *is* long, from your point of view, isn't it? This is such a simple thing—and the meaning so obvious—beautiful as it is——"

"Let's try it again, if you don't mind. We played it rather over-sentimentally, I think. One can't afford to do that, with a plain, heroic *motif* like this one. Don't slow me up there and there, please—" he indicated the places by a

tap of his bow. "I can't march ahead with you hanging on to your chords."

"'The professorial attitude!'" murmured Mary, saucily, quoting from herself. "What if *I* take charge and insist that it ought to be played with a proper observance of sentiment? Not that I intend to—you're quite right. Let's try it again, and I'll be as austere as you like."

They tried it again, and this time Mary let the 'cello indicate its own reading of the stately measures, with a result decidedly more satisfying, even to her own ear. Then Mark selected another composition, and Mary a third, and presently the pair were so deep in the interest of the new association that neither noticed how late the hour was. Miss Graham, in another room, had heard, had come softly to the door, and had stolen away again, rejoicing but afraid to break the spell.

"Oh, that was simply splendid!" Mary declared, breathless with the rapid reading of a difficult score, as the music ended on one after another of great final chords which had deeply satisfied something within her. "Somehow that blows off a tremendous amount of steam that was threatening to explode and wreck something. Don't you ever feel that way?—I suppose not!" she added, regarding searchingly the face before her. "And yet"—as an expression new to her observation crossed that face—"I almost think you do—a little!"

Mark Fenn looked back at her steadily for an instant. Then he laid down instrument and bow, rose to his feet, leaned against a corner of the piano and folded his arms.

"My dear Mary Fletcher," he said, "I think I shall have to make a statement or two to you. I dislike to be personal and call your attention to myself, but there seems no other way. Do you know—I object intensely to being regarded as a fossil by you—or by any other human being, for that

matter. Just what I've said or done—or not said or not done—since you arrived, to make you treat me as if I were your valetudinarian uncle I can't imagine. But this I know. I refuse to be considered an instructor in a classroom when I'm out of that classroom, as if I carried the shell of it around on my back. And I want you to know that when we reached that magnificent climax at the end of that last movement, my pulse was probably beating only a trifle slower than yours.—And it's not slowed down perceptibly since—hence this turning of the worm!"

His eyes held her—the fire in them was genuine. Mary responded to it like the sensitive quicksilver she was.

"I do beg your pardon!" she said, with a change of manner as attractive as it was spontaneous. "I *have* been thinking you old before your time—and hated to see it too. There's something about teaching—it does make men old, if they don't look out. You have just a bit of a stoop in your shoulders, you know—and you shouldn't have at—what is it?—Not forty, yet?"

He laughed, rather bitterly. "Hardly! Do I really suggest forty—at thirty-five?"

"You certainly do—or did. At this moment, with your nice thick hair rumpled up a bit, and your eyes waked up, and—that attitude which says the male creature is asserting itself—I could easily imagine you a bare thirty. You really—why I *like* you better than I have since I was a little girl and you jumped me over the hedge. Goodness—you couldn't have been anything but a big boy then!"

"I'm only a bigger boy now, you know," he said, running his hand through the rumpled hair and setting it still more rampant. "I can't conceive what's made you so belligerent toward me ever since you came—when you weren't avoiding me completely. We used to be very good friends, I thought."

"Belligerent! It was you who were that. Letting me know the very instant you saw me that you thoroughly disapproved of me! Is that a basis, I ask you, for the renewal of friendship?"

"I didn't disapprove of you—only of one example of your work—of which you disapproved yourself. But—great Cæsar!—don't let's go back to that, now that there may be some slight chance of our finding common ground again. See here, Mary! Harriet and I were looking forward with the greatest pleasure to your coming back to us. We thought of you as the open-hearted girl you used to be, who'd be in and out of our little old house——Why, I went and invested in two new and decidedly expensive ties and a new hat, particularly that I might *not* look my horrible age. Harriet—I believe Harriet did something equally extravagant, with the idea of impressing you. And then you came—with a chip on your very pretty shoulder——"

"Which you instantly knocked off," declared Mary. Her eyes were sparkling now with a light which hadn't been in them for a month. "Yes, you knocked it off, Mark Fenn—*Professor* Mark Fenn—you know you did——"

"Take back that 'Professor'——"

"It's your proper title——"

"I won't be 'professored' by you, Mary, of all people."

"Mister, then," substituted Mary, wickedly.

"Why not plain Mark? I *am* plain Mark, I'm well aware, and can't interest or amuse you as the men you know in your own world can do so well. But—I mightn't make so poor a friend, Mary. Anyhow—it seems a pity to live next door to each other for a year and keep on—collecting chips. Doesn't it?"

"It does indeed," she admitted. "Well, if we continue to play the classics together—with an occasional bit of ragtime, just to refresh us——" she broke off, laughing at his face.

"There you go, again! Don't tell me you don't like ragtime. Listen——"

She slipped on to the bench again, struck a few gay notes and plunged into a song of the day, with which, it is hardly necessary to say, she did not expect him to be familiar. To her surprise, after the first two measures, a clear whistle joined her, and they finished the dashing lines together. She swung about upon the bench.

"That wasn't so bad, after all, was it?" she challenged him. "How on earth did you come to know it?"

"Pretty bad—though clever enough, too, in its way. How did I know it? You don't really ask me that—in these degenerate days!—But after Beethoven—and Händel——"

"It was unkind of me. I apologize, though I can't be sorry, for it proved your humanness, as nothing else could do.—Well, shall we play again, some night? I wish we had a violin and could do some trios."

"I can find you one, easily. We have an excellent first violin in the college orchestra. He would be mightily pleased to join us—now and then."

She noted the emphasis and smiled appreciatively. "I should be very glad to have him—now and then," she agreed. "It will be the best thing in the world for me to have an evening of music when I've been grinding hard—as to-day. I was on the ragged edge of deep despondency when your 'cello pulled me out."

"Really? I'm glad. I was rather in the dumps myself—though it doesn't seem possible now.—*Is* the work pulling hard? I'm sorry for that—unless—it means that something substantial is to be hauled up out of the depths."

"The trouble is—nothing seems to be on the other end of the rope—it's just caught on a snag. I've about given up"—She bit her lip and finished the sentence hurriedly—"about given up thinking work will ever come easily again."

"That's good!"

"You don't mean that—Professor Mark!"

"Is that my punishment? All right—I won't continue on those lines. Instead I'll say——"

Miss Graham's old tall clock on the staircase landing clanged a slow, impressive warning. Mark pulled out his watch.

"I'll say it some other time," he finished. "Who knew it was twelve o'clock!"

Mary's laugh was delicious. "I did—and loved it that you didn't. Is it a crime to be up at this hour—playing Beethoven?"

"Very nearly, playing anything, on College Hill—unless it's a party."

"It's been the nicest kind of a party, I should say. Let's have 'em often, now we've begun."

"I'll be delighted. Good-night, Mary."

"Good-night—Mark."

She closed the door upon his ruggedly well-knit figure, recalling the smile which had lighted the rather fine modelling of his face. In the future, she thought, she wouldn't need to avoid so carefully the chance of hearing what he really thought about her work. If he was only thirty-five, could whistle ragtime, and distinctly didn't want to be given a title, whether it belonged to him or not, it seemed possible that she might get off more easily than she had feared. Anyhow, the deep, splendid tones of the 'cello had thrilled her in the glorious music of the master, and if she could not work to-morrow it would not be for lack of the mental and nervous stimulus to which she was so acutely susceptible. For this she was strangely indebted to a man who, she surmised, considered her work too emotional, too unrestrained; and the thought gave her a most unrighteous satisfaction—upon which she shortly went quite happily to sleep.

## CHAPTER V

### A Bridge Builder

"WHAT on earth can she be doing?" Mark Fenn, on an afternoon in early August, tramping along a woodland path which ran beside a small stream, came to a standstill, staring between the slender trunks of a group of birches toward a spot a few yards beyond and below him where energetic operations of some sort were in progress. A blue-clad figure was staggering toward the brook's edge carrying a stone rather too heavy for a woman's strength. Across the tumbling width of the small chasm an irregular heap of similar stones suggested that the labourer was attempting to construct a bridge, but the exceedingly casual look of the foundation thus laid brought a hint of a smile to the lips of the observer.

He removed his pipe from his mouth, softly knocked out its ashes and put it in his pocket, while he stole a little nearer the scene of action. Mary Fletcher as a bridge builder presented a new and interesting study. She was splashed from head to foot, and even as he watched, a fresh vol-

ume of water rose from the invaded stream in answer to the fall of the latest addition to the extending heap of stones, and turned a large area of blue linen to a damp expanse of deeper blue. The adding of the new stone was wasted effort, for it promptly rolled off the others, escaping to a deep pool just beyond.

"Oh—*hang!*" exploded an angry voice, and a doubled fist sent a futile gesture after the deserter. But the next instant Mary was dragging at another and heavier stone, tugging with panting breath, and finally heaving it down upon the wobbling foundation into a position where it hung perilously upon the edge of things, too far to be reached from the bank, of no possible use except to obstruct further progress.

The next instant a small round-head snatched up from the bank went spinning after it, glanced off it, and sank tamely to the bottom. Mary Fletcher threw up both clenched hands into the air, crying out something unintelligible but conveying to the hearer an unmistakable tension of feeling out of all seeming proportion to the cause thereof. She flung herself down upon the bank, a figure of baffled discontent. The next instant she was sitting erect again, startled by a quiet observation from a few feet's distance.

"If it must be done, it must be done differently. Would you be willing to engage an engineer—who isn't afraid to wade in?"

"Thank you—I wanted to do it myself."

There was no welcoming smile on Mary's face, and Mark's reflected a corresponding gravity.

"You can't—without getting in. And you need heavier stones than you can lift. Besides, unless you intend to build a dam, you need to leave free places for the stream to run through, or it'll wash everything away."

"I suppose so. Of course I don't know how to do it

properly. I did think if I threw on stones enough I might in the end get a bridge out of it."

"About fifty yards below you can cross without one."

"But I wanted to build a bridge!" cried Mary—and beat her fist upon the ground.

Mark Fenn regarded her for an instant without speaking. He saw something in the look with which she was gazing at the pile of stones which made him suddenly a little anxious.

"All right," he said quietly, "let's build it together. Many's the time I've done it, as a boy. I see plenty of good material all about."

Mary did not look at him—indeed she had given him but one glance since his arrival. In spite of her replies to his questions she seemed to him in her strange mood incredibly remote.

"Unless," he added, "you've tired yourself out and will let me do it for you."

She rose to her feet. "Go ahead," she said briefly. "I'll help—if I know enough."

Without further words Mark went at it. Coat off, trousers rolled above his knees, he stood in the centre of the narrow stream, and began the thing all over again with a well-placed, substantial foundation, wide and compact, such as might be expected to withstand the rush of the current. Mary silently placed within his reach each stone as he indicated it. He permitted her to tug and pull as she would, except now and then, when the effort was obviously too much for her. In due course the task was completed, a structure sufficiently solid to be trusted for the crossing. Not a word had been said not called for by the work in hand.

Mary stood and looked down at the sturdy, small bridge, and Mark, taking his place beside her upon the bank, regarded it with the satisfaction the man feels in having relived an experience of his boyhood. He had put into the construction the most careful work possible, and for a moment he felt the

glow of pleasure which succeeds any successful physical feat. At the next moment, however, his thoughts returned to the person beside him, whose moody look had been not in the least dissipated by the labours of the hour.

"It's very fine," she now said, slowly. "But I didn't do it myself. The analogy is perfect. I can do nothing, myself—any more. I can't even place the first stone—right."

Mark sat down upon the bank and put on his socks and shoes. A barefooted workman is no anomaly. As a companion and adviser it had become obligatory to resume more formal attire. He put on his coat and ran his hand across his hair, thrusting it back into place. He returned to stand beside Mary, the strong colour in his face telling of a healthy circulation, his mind working rapidly. The hour had come, he was sure, when he must try to show her he could really be a friend in need.

"I wonder," he said, quietly, "if you'd do me the honour of telling me all about it. Of course I can't help guessing that your work isn't going well—that you're at a standstill. Are you letting discouragement get the upper hand?"

"It's not only got the upper hand," Mary answered bitterly. "It's thrown me—and bound and gagged me. I'm helpless—and—I think I'm going quite mad with rage. When I began to build this bridge I—thought—if I could build it I should have—proved that I could create something—if only a child's plaything. It seems I can't do even that."

"You tried a man's task."

"I want to *do* a man's task! That's it—exactly. I'm tired of doing womanish work—of building bridges that won't stand. Besides—building that bridge wasn't a man's task. I could have waded out and laid the bottom stones as securely as you did—and built up just as strong a crossing. I hadn't the patience. I wanted——"

"You wanted to stand on the bank and throw them in, and

have them lodge by some happy chance just where they needed to be. And then—you grew cynical and unreasonable because they didn't."

"I've always done it—before!" Mary cried, defiantly. "Stood on the bank and thrown the stones, and they lodged, and the bridge was built—and people crossed on it."

"And you didn't get your feet wet!"

"I didn't need to."

"You admitted, a minute ago," Mark suggested, "that the bridges didn't always stand."

It was at this point that Mary's nerves gave way completely.

"I'm going home," she said unsteadily. "If I don't—I shall go to pieces and cry. I wouldn't cry—before you—for anything I can think of. I'm not a crying person—I'm *not!* I won't break my record."

"You shall not," he agreed, abandoning his hurriedly conceived plan of getting to the bottom of her distress and substituting another. There was more than one way of being the best friend he knew how to be, and quite evidently he must use a different method than that of lecturing to her on her faults if he would help her—for the hour, at least. She was in no condition to bear up under an analysis of her situation, if he were competent to make one.

Therefore they walked home together, through wood and lane, and Mark, glancing from time to time at Mary's profile as they went along for the most part silently, thought he saw that the long strain of unprofitable self-communings was telling upon her. Her colour was good, for she had been out of doors too constantly to lose it, but there was a contraction between her brows and a tenseness about her mouth which he didn't like to see, and there was also more than a suggestion in her manner that she was keeping a grip upon herself with difficulty.

Before he left her, however, he said the thing which he most wanted to say, for he had grown surer and surer that it was the thing she needed most. He delayed saying it until they were at the parting, having come up through Miss Graham's orchard and garden to the point where a gap in the hedge between her land and his proved that communication by this means was frequent.

"I've wished I could help you," he said. "But I can see that you're not fit just now to talk or think about your work. I wish you would drop it entirely for a time——"

"I can't," Mary interrupted, brokenly. "I've got to think it through. I've got to get somewhere. I—there's no other way. Never mind—I will—somehow. Don't bother about me. I know I've seemed a little fool this afternoon, but——" She turned away. "Good-bye," she said.

He took a step after her and laid hold upon her hand—which he was startled to find was cold as ice.

"Mary," he said, to her averted face, "there's one thing I can do for you, and that's to—stand by. Your ship isn't sinking—far from it—and you're not going to abandon her. But the seas seem to be running high, and I think you've got to make port for some repairs to the engines. Meanwhile—my ship is going to stand by and keep in touch. I want you to know that. You may not care—much—just now, whether I'm there or not. But—sometime—perhaps you will. Anyhow—I *am* there, and nothing can make me change my course from yours while you're in trouble."

She looked around at him. The first smile he had seen on her face this afternoon touched it in answer to this speech. It was an odd, forced smile, however, and gave him no relief from his anxiety. Nor did her words.

"I admit I'm quite human enough to have that touch me, Mark. There's nothing you—or anybody—can do for me—except that. But if—some night—my ship goes head on, on

a rock, and sinks before you can get to me, don't mind too much. Maybe I'd never have made port, anyhow."

He would have kept her, to say something still more reassuring—if he could have found it—but she pulled her hand away, and only shook her head as she fairly ran from him, toward the house. He looked after her, his face grave.

"It's like trying to handle some wild thing," he told himself, "for a blundering fellow like me to try to come near her at all. Outside of my classes I don't know anything about women—how should I be able to help her when she's overstrung like that? Yet—if I'm not mistaken—somebody or something must, or she'll be beyond it."

He would have been still surer of this if he could have known how she spent the night. Though she went early to her room, it was not to sleep. Daylight saw her dressed for the street, a small bag packed, her room left in order.

When Miss Graham came down to breakfast she found a note beside her plate, and Eliza explaining, in considerable trepidation.

"Miss Mary's gone down to New York, Miss Graham. She wouldn't let me call you. She told me to tell you not to worry about her—she'd be back in a few days. She took the notion in the night and just went and did it. I came down early and found her making herself some coffee, so of course I got what I could for her in a hurry.—Now don't be worried, Miss Graham. You know she's—why—I don't suppose folks that write *are* just like other folks, do you?"

"Did she—was she—did you think she looked *well*, Eliza?"

The housekeeper noted that Miss Graham's white hand shook a little as she unfolded Mary's note. The colour had quite left the delicate face.

"Oh, yes, Miss Graham—she was very lively all the while I saw her. She called it a lark—seemed to be sort of excited

and pleased about it. It was something about being there to-morrow morning in time for somebody. You—you read the letter, Miss Graham—that'll tell you more than I can. There's nothing to worry about, I'm sure. Going to France and all—I expect it seems nothing at all to her to make up her mind in the night and just catch a train in the morning, so."

Miss Graham read the note. It was and was not reassuring, though evidently it was meant to be so. But it left Mary's aunt vaguely uneasy, she could not tell why.

MOST BELOVED:

Mary wouldn't be Mary if she didn't do erratic things, would she? But really this isn't so erratic as it seems. I didn't sleep awfully well, and it suddenly occurred to me that if I could catch Alexandra Warren before she gets away on her fortnight's vacation, and have a good talk with her, it would be worth doing. I know she's on the edge of leaving, and suddenly I want to see her so very badly that I feel I'm justified in startling you this way. I know you get your best sleep toward morning so I wouldn't wake you. I'll be back very soon—I'm only taking a few things. If I can get what I want down there I'll come back a more reasonable person—I know I've driven you to distraction for weeks with my moods and vagaries. Forgive me, won't you—for I love you very much, and shall be eager to get back to you.

MARY.

"It's like her father," Miss Graham told herself. "He used to start on a journey at an hour's notice—and accomplish great ends by doing it. Still—it does seem strange."

She went up to Mary's room, and found it perfectly in order—but for one thing. The small fireplace was full of fluttering ashes and half-burned typewritten paper, some of which, by reason of a light wind of the past night, had blown out upon the floor and littered it untidily. Miss Graham swept these up herself, setting a match to the unconsumed remains.

"I don't see," she mused as she watched them rapidly flame up, "why it seems to be so difficult for her now, when always before, as she has told me, it was so easy. Perhaps—perhaps she is trying to do something too hard for her. I wonder—if that is necessary."

Already, a hundred miles away, Mary could have told her that it was necessary. Her courage had risen a little with the mere getting away. Eliza, watching her, had thought her "excited and pleased"; she had been precisely that, and her light talk as she hurriedly ate and drank, that early morning, had been the sign of her relief at the thought that for this day and to-morrow she was not to be roaming wood and plain in the vain search for the undiscoverable.

All that day, in the train, her fellow passengers were drawn to observe her, they knew not why. It was as if someone were among them who was not like the other women in the car. The perfection of her travelling clothes, the peculiar charm of her face, with its look of intensity, her quiet indifference to any observation, did not wholly account for the interest she roused. Men watched her furtively from behind newspapers; women openly scanned and studied her.

"She's an actress, *I'll* say," one feminine passenger across the aisle whispered to another. "She hasn't once looked at anybody. That's for effect—it isn't natural. I heard her voice once when she spoke to the porter—it was a regular stage voice. It seems as if I'd seen her face somewhere, too."

This might easily have been true. Many times had Mary Fletcher's face appeared in magazine advertising columns.

"Maybe she's a movie actress," speculated her companion.

The other shook her head. "Mm-*mm*," she negatived. "More likely one of those society business women. There's an air about her—just the way there is about them. You can buy things of 'em—but you can't touch 'em."

These two women tried in vain to make inroads into Mary's

close-drawn privacy. In vain they made general observations in the too-small dressing room, or drew aside with smiling apologies when a lurch of the car or influx of other women crowded them against the stranger who had so roused their interest. Mary's preparations for sleep were rapid and discreet; not once could they so much as meet her eyes in one of the mirrors which prevent the possibility of withdrawal from the curious. She would have secured a stateroom if it had been possible, so late; forced into contact with fellow human beings of her own sex, in an atmosphere redolent of talcums and toilet waters, her present mood and manner surrounded her with an invisible wall there was no breaking through, though she was only slightly conscious of rearing it.

The truth was that the whole journey was to her a mere necessary interval between the state she had left and that into which she hoped to emerge. She was as completely insulated from all contact with these people as if she had been alone. Trained to observe, as a rule professionally concerned with the actions and reactions of all whom she met, she was making this journey as one who has suffered a bereavement travels with veil down and eyes averted; the inner consciousness shutting away all immediate environment.

But morning found her where she longed to be. It was barely nine o'clock when Alexandra Warren in her suburban home, stooping over a trunk she was packing, heard a joyful cry.

"Oh, Sandy, Sandy! Heaven is merciful, and you haven't gone! I didn't dare wire before I started, to find out. I had to come, anyway—bless your dear, delightful back. It would have been worth coming for, just to see your back, even if you hadn't turned round!"

"Why, Mary Fletcher!"

There succeeded one of those impetuous embraces with which Mary had been accustomed, after long intervals of

rather boyish distaste for manifestations of affection, to show unexpected emotion over her best friend. The way in which she now clung to Alexandra, laughing and half crying, shed instant light upon that wise woman's mind.

"Let me look at you," demanded Alexandra, holding Mary off at arm's length. "Yes, I thought so. You've been having a bad time over something, and have reached the limit of your restraint. But—my dear—I never saw you so thin—and worn. Your eyes—why, child—what is the matter?"

"Haven't slept for two nights—that's all. I'm all right, really. That is, *I'm—all—wrong!*"

Alexandra sat down. She pulled a pillow off a couch and dropped it at her own feet.

"Sit down there, and put your head on my knee, and tell me all about it," she commanded.

"I shall die—if I can't," Mary said, biting her lip because it trembled. "And I'm afraid I can't. But I've got to make you understand—some of it."

"You may not find me so dull."

"Oh, *Sandy*——"

She put her head down in Alexandra Warren's lap and broke into wild sobbing. It was no summer shower, it was a storm from the beginning, but before it was over it became a tempest. In vain her friend tried to soothe and quiet—in the end she became alarmed.

"Mary, stop! You *must* stop, dear! Why, I shall have to send for a doctor, if you don't. Let me get you some valerian—Well, then—control yourself. You can—you *must!* —Mary!"

Suddenly, almost as suddenly as it had begun, the sobbing passed. "I won't—any more," a shuddering whisper declared. "I—didn't know it was coming, or I—no, I think it *had* to come! I hate to cry—I don't cry—I detest crying women. But——"

"Never mind—the pressure had to be relieved somehow, and you'll be better now. It's not like you and it makes me anxious. Something must be radically wrong, Mary. I'm afraid you have tried to go to work too soon. *Is* it the work that worries you?"

So Mary told her—all that she could tell. After all, it was not much. It seldom is much that can be told of the spirit's real distress. But from the recital, now halting, now fiery, Alexandra became more and more sure that Mary was at a crisis in her life's experience through which she must have the wisest human counsel that her friend could give—or that she would take—for the giving and the receiving of counsel are two mightily different things, as the older woman had long ago discovered.

"So I've come," concluded Mary, sitting back on her feet and passing her two hands across her now flushed cheeks, "to get this over with you and then go into town and see—the one person who can give me back any confidence in myself. He's always done it—I don't know how—and if anybody can now, he can. A month ago I wouldn't see him or tell him anything, though he came up on purpose. Now—just all at once—I can hardly wait to see him!"

"Mr. Kirkwood?" Alexandra looked disturbed.

"Of course. Oh, my wireless is tuned to his—it always has been, though I wouldn't acknowledge it. The awful truth is—and that's what's been driving me frantic—that the suspicion has been growing and growing that I—can't do anything without him!"

"Oh, *no!*" The exclamation was one of deep dissent. "Why, think of the almost two years you were away from him, in France. You were doing absolutely independent work——"

"That was entirely different. I had every stimulus. I couldn't help writing of what I saw—and divined. But

back here"—Mary made a gesture of unhappy abandon —"Oh, perhaps I didn't realize it, but I think I did, in a way—he—he—why, he just had me in the hollow of his hand. The only thing I ever did without him was—that abominable trash I wrote when I first came back—to prove that I was independent. Do you wonder I ran away?— And now—oh, shame on me, I suppose, but I'm so desperate I can't help it!—I'm going back to him."

"My dear! Are you sure that's best? Not that I don't admire John Kirkwood—and trust his advice—to a certain extent. But I don't like this confession of his power over you. Now that you've broken away from his influence for a time, hadn't you better—well—fight it out, this struggle for independence?"

She sat looking steadily across into Mary's face, though Mary's eyes after an instant dropped away from her. Miss Warren's own eyes were very fine, their gaze clear and discerning. The city librarian, in her years of work, had made very many human contacts, had learned to read facts in faces and subtleties in speech. Not for nothing had she known many of the best and wisest of the men and women of the great city. Her ideals were very high, her love for Mary very great; her faith in her ability, in spite of the all but dismaying confession of her dependence on another mind, presumably keener and stronger than her own, was only slightly shaken by this new knowledge. But now—she suffered a shock greater than that which she had lately received.

Mary slowly lifted her eyes again and in them was written a misery so deep that her friend's heart sank.

"Sandy," she said, very low, "I'd like to take that advice —I would indeed. I've been giving it to myself all these weeks of struggle. But the bitter truth is—I've grown afraid that if I don't write something coherent—workman-like— pretty soon—I never will. I'm—why, Sandy—I'm just plain

scared! Do you know what that means? Scared—so that I can't sleep! Scared, so that—oh, I can't tell you! I suppose if I went to a doctor he'd call it nervous depression. It's not that and I'm not going to any doctor. The only cure for me is to produce something that I'm proud of, so that I can feel again that amazing tonic of success. If I can once do that—even if I do it with John Kirkwood's help—I think I'll be strong again, to—break away. But—I guess I'm like a drunkard who has to be sobered off on—more whiskey. It doesn't always do to take the prop away all at once."

Alexandra studied again the exquisite worn young face before her, noted afresh the look of strain. She recalled hours of wild joy in the past when the author had completed a difficult task and had seemed for hours thereafter exalted to some heaven of her own. In succeeding hours she might suffer a corresponding reaction and be weary to exhaustion, though still so happy that she would cry out that it was worth it. Alexandra was forced in her own mind reluctantly to admit that it might be Mary had been too long without this necessary stimulus of reward, and that she must have again the relief of consultation with this other mind which had the power to lift her to heights of accomplishment. At any rate, it was clear to her that she could not attempt to defeat Mary's plans at this late hour. The only thing that she could do was to stand by her—a conclusion curiously like one which had been arrived at less than twenty-four hours before, by another friend of Mary's whom Alexandra had never met.

"Very well, dear," she said, rising with decision. "You said you meant to take the next train in to Mr. Kirkwood's office. That leaves at nine forty. I can easily be ready, and I'll go with you. If need be, I'll stay in town until your conferences with him are over, even though they take

some days. Or you can come back out with me here each night——"

"Oh—but it's your vacation——"

"That doesn't matter. I'm not specially tired and can spare a few days as well as not. Besides, being with you again, after all these months, will be better than a vacation."

Mary looked her friend in her clear eyes, her own showing a little bloodshot through her thick lashes. "Oh, but you *are* a trump!" was her grateful tribute. "If I didn't need you so I wouldn't allow it, but—I'm afraid I'm too weak to resist."

An hour later, in the city, the pair were shot upward to the high floor of the crowded downtown building in which were *The Centrepiece* offices. Mary Fletcher's eyes were now bright with excitement, the look of weariness which had been so noteworthy had vanished. The mere thought of an interview with this man was keying her to tension again.

"Mr. Kirkwood's out of town," said a laconic office boy, new to the place and unacquainted with Miss Fletcher's standing as a contributor to the magazine.

"Oh!" Mary breathed it like a sigh of despair.

"When will he be back?" Alexandra asked.

"Thursday."

"Could he be reached before then?"

"Don't think so. He didn't leave any forwarding address."

Alexandra was not sure that this was true, but nothing further could be elicited from the boy. She asked for a subeditor whose name she knew, but Mary hastily interposed, under her breath: "No, no, Sandy. We'll go. This is Tuesday. I'd rather wait."

Outside in the cab she explained. "I don't want him called back for me—I want to come in upon him when he doesn't expect me."

"Will you go back home with me, dear?"

"No, I'll stay in town. It's not very hot just now."

"Then I'll stay with you."

"No, I won't have it."

"Then you must come back with me. Be reasonable, Mary. You are worn out. The two days' rest will be good for you before you see Mr. Kirkwood. I can make you very comfortable."

They fought it out for several minutes, Mary finally yielding. Back in the pleasant suburban town she gave herself up to her friend's ministrations, outwardly, at least. The two days were got through somehow. On Thursday morning Alexandra took the precaution of telephoning in to the office, learning that Mr. Kirkwood had wired that his return would be delayed until the morrow. At this news Mary went quite out of her head, announcing that she must do something or she couldn't endure it. This time it was Alexandra who yielded, accompanied Mary to a New York hotel, and went with her on a ceaseless round of supposed diversion, beginning with shopping and ending amid the blare of a summer musical comedy offering which outraged every sensibility and left both women feeling besmirched and wearied beyond expression.

"Poor Sandy—what a way to spend the first days of your precious vacation!" mourned Mary. "I'm a fiend to permit it. I'm desperately ashamed of myself for dragging you back here, yet I don't know how I'd have lived without you. Anyhow, it's over now. One more night—and I'm going to sleep if I have to drug for it."

All nightmares end, however, and this one came to its finish with the announcement of the office boy next morning.

"Yes, ma'am. Mr. Kirkwood's in. Just got back. Card?"

Mary sent it in, her heart throbbing disconcertingly. Could she be the same person who had so high and mightily

dismissed the editor on a certain summer evening, conveying so accurately to him her indifference to his presence that he was stung into refusing to return next day?

Two minutes later an inner door opened, and a tall figure, clad in the freshest of light summer apparel, came rapidly forward. The light in John Kirkwood's eyes spoke his astonished pleasure.

"Mary Fletcher!—Miss Warren! Why, this is wonderful of you! When did you come? Why didn't you let me know?"

His eyes studied Mary's face and concern appeared in his own.

"I thought it would be rather fun to surprise you," Mary told him. "I ran down to see Alexandra and—well—I really wanted to see you, too—to talk things over."

"You are tired," he said abruptly. "You don't want to talk in this hot office, I'm sure. Just wait, please, while I dispose of a few details—I've been away for a week.—Then I'm at your service."

"Are you sure you can spare the time?"

"Unquestionably—for you. We'll go somewhere, to a cool and quiet spot, if there's one to be had, and spend the whole day."

It took him long enough, however, to arrange his affairs, to prove to his guests that getting loose again wasn't quite as easy as he would have them think. Brief consultations with various members of his staff, rapid decisions of matters brought to his attention by one and another, telephone talks, short personal interviews with persons who had appointments—Alexandra caught enough glimpses of the editor in action to appreciate what he was about to do for Mary. In due time, however, he came to them, hat in hand.

"There's a motor waiting below, and a lunch is being put up at a very good place where we'll stop on our way. If

you'll permit me I'm simply going to take charge of things and carry you both off for the day and evening. I think I can plan a programme which will prove sufficiently refreshing to justify my being high-handed about it."

"I think we're both glad to have you high-handed," Alexandra assured him. She had never liked John Kirkwood so well as she did to-day. After her struggles during three days to handle the difficult problem of Mary's breakdown—for such she felt it to be—it was a tremendous relief to hand it over, if only for a day, to this capable man who evidently meant to take things in hand, man fashion, and dispose of all difficulties.

Kirkwood carried a well-stuffed brief-case and a couple of books besides.

"I've picked up several good things in my absence," he remarked, as they fled uptown in a large closed car so shiningly new and luxurious that it betrayed no sign of having been hired. "These two books I'll engage will keep even such an exacting critic as you absorbed while Mary and I go over whatever affairs she has in mind. I've some matters of my own I want to consult her about, as well, if she'll give me the chance. Your coming couldn't have been more timely. I was just 'wishin' to go a-fishin'"—and that with Mary Fletcher herself."

His eyes met Mary's. He himself had been away upon a vacation, preceding the interesting business trip from which he had just returned, and she had rarely seen him looking so well. The usual tired lines were gone from his face; his lean, long body had filled out by a matter of many pounds; his colour was that of the outdoor life he had been for the most part living for a month. Even his clothes, to eyes for the last half year grown accustomed to the somewhat careless dressing of the average man in the small college town, were refreshing to note.

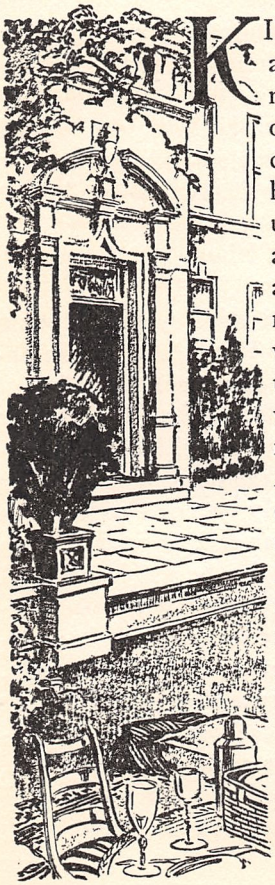
"You don't look as if you'd ever gone fishing in your life, except for authors," Mary observed.

"Ah, that's my new suit, of which I'm inordinately proud —because my tailor had to let his tape-line slip along a couple of extra inches over my chest—and expressed his surprise thereat. Even though by December I've shrunk to emaciation again I shall comfort myself by taking a look at these clothes, hanging in my press, and telling myself that what has been can be again—next midsummer vacation."

But he didn't tell her what he was thinking—that if she didn't stop growing thin and worn she would some day lose her look of enchanting youth which had thus far, through all her days of work and experience, merely grown interestingly mature. As yet she was touchingly attractive in these signs of harassment and fatigue. But he knew full well that all too soon there might come upon her that fatal change which marks the borderline between two well-defined stages of life, across which there is no going back. How to arrest her progress toward that line had been uppermost in his mind ever since he had set eyes upon her to-day.

## CHAPTER VI

### A Challenge



KIRKWOOD could hardly have chosen a cleverer course than that which he now pursued. He wanted to get Mary out of the hot city, and yet the open country was not his goal. She had had enough, he considered, of Nature unshaven and unshorn, of wildwood and rocky glen. An ordered Nature, an out-of-doors trimmed and finished, remindful of the resources of the city's wealth—this must be the setting for their day together. The car flew toward a certain great estate, the former home of one of the names of American history, closed to the general public, the picturesque old mansion unoccupied except by a caretaker. Kirkwood was confident, however, of securing permission to spend the day in the grounds, and even to take his guests into the distinguished old house, full of relics and of suggestion.

"Oh, what a delightful spot!" Mary cried when presently she found herself established on a velvety green bank under magnificent spreading trees, the blue river lying broad be-

neath her feet, with gray-green shores beyond. Behind her, the ivy-covered stone walls of the famous mansion made a background, when she turned her head, for the figures of her two friends. A caretaker, with a large fee in his pocket, had brought out quaint chairs and table, a rug and cushions. Mary felt a little like a princess, with anything she might desire at her disposal. For the moment care dropped away from her; she found herself wishing to see the contents of the hamper which had come on board before they left the city. The place from which it had been brought out had been a guarantee of those contents.

"Hungry?" asked John Kirkwood blithely, the second time he caught Mary's glance wandering toward the hamper.

"Famished! Isn't it time to eat? I haven't wanted food for ages; now I can hardly wait."

"Good! We'll get to it at once. I hope they've put in what will appeal to us."

He had spared no pains, it became evident, to suit what he had guessed might be a capricious taste. As she ate delicious food, and drank pleasing iced beverages, Mary began to feel the weight upon her spirits lift a little. It certainly was comforting to be so considered and cared for, and somehow to have such a man as Kirkwood taking such thought for her was subtly flattering. It suddenly occurred to her that she had never quite appreciated, in her past association with him in the great city, how really pleasing he was in personal appearance, not to consider how agreeable were his manner and speech. Just once, as she sat listening to his entertaining talk, the image of Mark Fenn came into her mind. The contrast between the two men struck her afresh as that between the man who lives his life closely in touch with human affairs and interest, and him who remains secluded in a small world of thought and limited action. Mark Fenn had told her he would "stand by." Could he possibly know how

to give her even the beginning of such a sense of well-being and comradeship as could this man who smiled at her across the little feast he had made for her, and with whom she was about to have a conference such as would—she knew it already—clarify for her her befogged and labouring brain and make her want to work again? Hardly! There could be but one answer to that. She told herself that Mark Fenn didn't know even the alphabet of the language which John Kirkwood could speak with ease.

The hamper was repacked and set away. Kirkwood made Miss Warren comfortable, pointed out certain outstanding chapters in the books he was leaving with her, tucked a rug and a cushion under his arm and frankly asked:

"Are you game, dear lady, to be left a considerable while? I've a notion we shall be rather likely to forget how time is passing while we talk shop. But we sha'n't be far away—a a call will bring us even though we're out of sight. I want Mary to forget all sense of duty, even to your kind self."

"You need have none at all." Alexandra Warren settled herself, too accustomed to this rôle to resent it, and too anxious for Mary's welfare not to welcome it, even though it obviously made of herself a mere accessory.

A few rods farther up the river, in a spot still more coolly secluded by heavy tree growth than that of the lunching place, though open at one point to the river sparkling in the sunlight, Kirkwood spread his rug and placed his cushion.

"How would you like to take a little sleep while I smoke a pipe not far away and keep guard?" he suggested. "Wouldn't you be fitter for our confab for a bit of rest first? We've all been talking rather uninterruptedly."

Mary dropped upon the rug, took off her hat, and laid her head upon the cushion—it was of a rich blue and made a pleasant background, as she had already noted that it would. Her fondness for colour was strong, a fact of which Kirk-

wood was not unaware. The caretaker had offered him a choice of cushions.

"I'd love it—for just a few minutes." Mary smiled up at him. She felt more like herself than she had been for many weeks. "I'll just play sleep, for the length of one pipe—and then please come back."

"You tempt me to pack it lightly," he said, as he strolled away.

When he glanced back, from a discreet distance through the trees, he noted with satisfaction how completely the slender figure seemed to have relaxed upon the rug with the arms thrown back and clasped above the head, the face turned upward. He thought she was probably staring up into the heavy green leafage above and knew that if it were so not even sleep could be better medicine for a mind ill at ease. For that Mary's mind was just now a stronghold for ravaging discomfort he had read at the first glance.

"I want," said John Kirkwood slowly, "to tell you a story."

He lay stretched on his side upon the turf, at Mary's feet, his head propped upon his hand. He was looking at the blue water shimmering in the distance between the low dropping branches of the great oaks beneath which the consultation had been held.

Consultation? Rather had it been a clinic, or so both had felt without saying so. Kirkwood, however, had not made a complete diagnosis; for the present he was postponing operation.

Mary had made almost a clean breast of it—she could not do otherwise. He knew now as nearly as she could tell him how deeply despair had laid hold upon her. The one thing she had not told him—could not bring herself to it—was the humiliating fact of her dependence upon himself. If he

had guessed this feature of her trouble he had shown no sign.

"It's a long story," he said—and filled his pipe again with a word of apology. "I can talk better," he explained.

"You always could. It's a tremendous advantage."

He began with deliberation of speech, sketching in the background of his story. He did this vividly, with few words, as a skilful reporter might. Then he began to tell the tale.

As it went forward, presently he drew himself up to a sitting position, though his eyes still remained upon the sparkling blue water through the trees. Then, suddenly, having reached a point in the story where events began to quicken, situations to develop, characters to strengthen, he began to speak faster, and now and again he glanced at his listener. He found her eyes upon him with a peculiar intensity of gaze, denoting entire concentration. He had been a little doubtful, when he had begun, whether he could secure this. She had been so absorbed in her own troubles, he had feared lest he could not obtain complete control of her attention. It was very necessary to his purpose to do this, and as he now received assurance that he had succeeded, his ability to speak effectively increased.

He got to his feet and stood before her, leaning against a tree-trunk, his pipe grasped by the bowl, its fires extinct. He needed no other stimulation now than that of her intent interest. With all the art at his command he brought his recital along toward its climax, each minor crisis a dramatic triumph in itself, the whole effect growing in power with each successive unfolding of the extraordinary plot. As he came to the final scenes he lost himself in his own absorption in his theme. He became actor as well as speaker; unconscious slight gestures with the hand which held the pipe bowl, changes of facial and vocal expression illuminating the drama

of his conclusion till, as he ended, he was as a man inspired, the fires he had lighted in his own imagination glowing in his every aspect. Quite of himself, thus, apart from the story he had told, he had become an irresistible object of interest. As for the story itself——

For a minute, after the telling had ended, the two pairs of eyes continued to look into each other, each held by the profound impression of the story's climax. Then Mary's eyes dropped and Kirkwood turned away to stride off among the trees for a few paces. Wheeling, he came back, to see her pressing both hands over her eyes, a great breath swelling her throat.

He dropped upon the ground again and lay silent, his own pulses racing. The tale had gripped him in the telling beyond any anticipation he could have had of such effect upon himself. What the hearing had done to Mary Fletcher he could guess from his past knowledge of her, and his present recognition of her stirred and shaken state. Emotionally unstrung as he had known her to be, and as she had shown herself in her own recital, he realized that he had taken advantage, as he had never so ventured to do before, of her susceptibility to approach. To put it as it really was, he had come nearer to breaking down her guard than he had ever done—indeed, for the moment, she seemed to have no guard at all.

He left it to her to end the long silence. It took some time for her to reach the point where she could speak.

"Where did you—get that story?" she asked at last, with some constraint.

He smiled. He wouldn't have been human if it hadn't given him pleasure to answer that question. But he tried to answer it with modesty. He hadn't known quite how good the thing was till he had tried it on this ideal listener. It was like drawing a new bow one had made across the strings

of a perfect violin—the tone had been unexpectedly rich and vibrant.

"I've been working it out for a long time," he explained. "Somehow I had to do it—I couldn't get away from it."

"I shouldn't think you could. Do you mean—it is all—yours?"

He nodded. "A poor thing, but mine own. No—I won't pretend I think it poor—it got hold of me too deeply for that. But until you heard it I wasn't so sure. I wanted your reaction to it. I had it. So now I know there's something in it."

"You are going to—write it?"

It was his cue to delay the answer to that. It was for his advantage to keep her in suspense a little longer. He filled and lighted his pipe once more, first knocking out the heel. A man may always do this before he speaks—somehow a woman always excuses the delay. Kirkwood performed the ceremony with deliberation, while Mary watched each motion of his slim, lean hands. When finally he spoke it was after a succession of puffs and through an ascending cloud of blue-gray smoke.

"I wish I *could* write it, but—it's as impossible as any of the labours of Hercules."

"But—you could conceive it!"

He nodded. "That's different. It's my trade to study construction—to criticize it—to delight in it. But I could no more put that book on paper—it should make a book of good size—than I could build this oak beside us."

"I don't see why."

"Oh, yes, you do. I beg your pardon, but you do see, you know. To change the simile—I've only hewn out the marble till I got a general outline, in the mass, of the figure I'd like to see. It will take the sculptor—the artist—to chip

away the rest with a thousand delicate strokes and leave the perfect form."

"Oh, but you've dreamed the dream!" Her eyes were dark with envy.

"Have I? You don't know what a great big thrill it gives me to hear that—from you!"

He smiled at her but he met no answering smile.

"You've dreamed the dream—you've seen the vision. You've created a wonderful, wonderful thing——"

"Ah, but it's not created yet. A dream isn't——"

"It's *everything*. It's the *whole* thing really. Making it live in words is *nothing*—comparatively—if you once have the thought—the plan—that stirs you. Why—if in all these months I'd had that great idea of yours——"

"Mary, you forget. It's the long drudgery that tells. If it were as simple as that, I'd have written the book myself. It's not as simple as that. It's as difficult and long as—art."

"Oh, but it's a glorious road to take, once you know the goal. Who would mind plodding—climbing—struggling—up the hill of work, if you knew *that* was over the top? Not I!"

"Then—*write my book!*"

Her startled glance leaped to his. He was not smiling now—his intent look met her halfway and held her.

"*Oh—h——*" There can be no way of expressing literally the strange little wailing sound which escaped her lips. It was as if some starving thing were suddenly shown food—through a glass, darkly.

He was very gentle with her. "Please don't be frightened at the idea. I know it's sheer presumption of me to think of it——"

"*Oh—h——*" It was the wailing note again. "*Oh—don't.*"

"You mean—you wouldn't want even to consider taking

my outline?" He knew that wasn't what she meant. "You couldn't be absorbed in it—for yourself?"

"Absorbed!—But—I couldn't *do* it!"

"Couldn't *do* it! If you mean you're not equal to it—why, that's nonsense. You could do it magnificently. I don't know of any one who could do it so well. Why, Mary—the central figure—*Olivia*—is just—yourself! You'd have only to—live the part. Don't you recognize her? If you don't, then I've told the story badly."

This brought her up short. She considered it breathlessly.

"You see?" He pressed his advantage. "You would have only to live and breathe the character of *Olivia*—so to speak. Use your own reactions to your own experience—and then—carry them on logically to *Olivia's* conclusions. As for *Broughton*, well——" And he paused, watching her downcast face with its rapidly changing expressions. "If I might dare to serve as a suggestion of him, for your use—— Or am I too old—too cut and dried——"

She looked at him then and her lips curved into a hint of a laugh. "You are *Broughton*," she said.

"Well, then—don't you see? When you came to a place where it might be difficult to work out the psychology of their relations, you would have only to put it up to Mary Fletcher and John Kirkwood, and let them take a day off and have it out.—I know this sounds horribly egoistic and perhaps melodramatic—not to say impossible, and yet—I have a strong feeling that we could work together in that way, and perhaps produce something that neither of us could quite do separately."

"You mean—collaboration?" She suddenly put the question as if it had just occurred to her that he might want to see his name with hers upon the title page of a book thus evolved. He wondered what else she could call a product the whole

scheme for which he was to furnish. Yet it was clear that this thought gave her pause. He made haste to relieve her mind, recognizing that he had touched her pride and that he must make concession to it—for the present, at least.

"If I might have a share," he said quietly, "a most happy share in any work of yours, by means of any help in my power, direct or indirect, I should be quite content. As an editor, you must know I have long been used to doing creative work vicariously through suggestion to other minds, fitted as mine is not for the actual coinage of invention. And you will let me say this: I've never known a creative mind through which I should so like to make this vicarious expression of my own—as yours. It seems to me that—if I may so put it —my mind and yours—*articulate*."

She sat staring out at the river, through the trees. As the afternoon had advanced the light had changed and deepened. Where the blue waters had sparkled earlier in the day there now lay long shadows of indigo and darkest green, with purple edges outlining the opposite shore far across. Hours had gone by since Alexandra had been left alone with her books; Mary had forgotten that she existed. If Kirkwood remembered it made no difference to his plan of action. Hours like these were not to be cut short by any recognition of social duties. Let the duenna wait. As Mary's friend, for what else had she come?

He sat so still he might have been carved out of stone, while Mary looked away into space; well he knew that she was seeing nothing of the scene before her. He had said all there was any use in saying—that he readily divined. He had sown the seed—if it was to spring up at all he would not have long to wait. Mary was in no mood to deliberate. She would come to a decision soon, he was sure, for very inability to stand the strain put upon her judgment and her will. That he had tempted her powerfully he knew—it had been

in the wail of her tense voice. She was so hungry for the renewal of her ability to work that she was vulnerable now where once she would have been watchful against any declared alliance which threatened her independence, her acknowledged and outward independence. He thought she could not possibly have realized quite all that she had owed him from the beginning, nor understand that the new relation between them would be only a step further along the road of virtual mental subjection than the old.

Suddenly a question from her surprised him; made him sit up tensely.

"Would you want to carry out every detail of the story—just as you sketched it?"

"You mean—there's something about it you don't approve?"

"I mean—there were places in it that seemed to me to—a little—forgive me, please—degrade the whole."

"You don't feel that they were logically a part of the whole and so couldn't be omitted?"

"I've been brought up to feel," she said, steadily—more steadily than he would have thought possible just now—"that it's justifiable to introduce immorality only if it's made unlovely. Of course," she went on hurriedly, "I think the whole conception wonderfully fine—otherwise I shouldn't be attracted by it. But—the part where *Sylvia* and *Julian* are together for so long——You see,"—she stumbled over it—"as you told it I got rather the idea that you didn't—mind about it—that you thought it——" Here she stopped and the colour rose in her face. But her eyes met his frankly.

He gave her back the look with a frankness apparently as great as her own, though inside he was laughing a little, and saying to himself—"You beautiful little Puritan!—And I love you for it, too!"

"I feel," he said, as gravely as though he felt grave about it, "that it isn't always necessary for the true artist to depict only the phases of life which have the approval of the Ten Commandments. If he can give a faithful picture of the other side, if only to prove that he sees there *is* another side, and is not blind to it, it seems to me worth while. If your reader thinks you never dare to picture vice, will your portraiture of virtue be unfailingly convincing? And in my scheme for this book—don't you think the fine relation between *Olivia* and *Broughton* will be more than a foil for the questionable one between the other two? Will the reader need to have a *'Look on this picture, then on that!'* to point the moral for him?"

She considered it, her brows drawn together.

"It all depends, I think," she said, "on the way it is done."

"Of course it does! And in putting it into your hands I should know you'd handle such a situation as the one we're discussing with just those fine shades of discrimination which would redeem it from sordidness——"

"I shouldn't want to redeem it from sordidness," she said quickly. "It *is* sordid; it should be made to seem so. That's precisely my point. As you told that part of the story you—unconsciously, of course—made it—poetry. I don't think that's—fair! I shouldn't be willing to do it."

He saw that on this point he couldn't confuse her with words—that he must make the concession; that in spite of her longing to attempt this new and fascinating task her conscience—that conscience which he knew must have received its training from a father and mother whose life-work had been the looking after the minds and morals of the young—must be satisfied at the very start that it should never have to impeach her for her methods.

"Mary," he said—and the expression on his face lent sincerity to his words—"we shall never quarrel over your

resolution to keep your work up to the standards you have set for yourself. I should be the last man in the world to want you to descend a step from the plane where you are now. If you'll write this book, you shall do it in your own way. I'll be satisfied if you'll let a logical realism be its basis—a *logical* realism, I say, mind you. You need poetize nothing that should be told in unblinking prose—if you'll just be willing"—and he looked keenly at her—"*not* to idealize when truth and real art demand that you draw no veils over that which should be told. As for the poetry—you can't help putting that in—and not for anything would I have you leave it out. Now—will you trust me?—And will you——"

He left the direct question unconcluded, except as his eagerness for the answer was in the inflection with which he began to ask it.

Mary rose to her feet and stood looking off again at the blue and purple shadows, while Kirkwood watched her. She did not look like the Mary who had come with him to this spot, her appearance had so changed and lifted with her relief from her lonely search for light. Her eyes were the eyes of one who vividly perceives a means of escape from threatening disaster. When she turned to him at length he found himself wanting to put both arms around her, as if she had been a child who was showing both her need of him and her faith in him. There is nothing that can so move a man to tenderness as that.

"I think," she said, "I must say yes. I feel like one who has come up against a stone wall, with the tide rushing in behind, and no way through the wall.—And then suddenly you have shown me a way through—just one way. I must take it—or be swallowed up."

"Is it really like that to you?" he said, very gently. He took her outstretched hand and held it close. "Just a way through a wall? Well, then—I want you to believe that on

the other side of the wall lies that glorious road you spoke of a while back, and that I can walk along it with you."

A sudden light of mischief touched Mary's lips. "Ah, who's poetizing now?" she suggested. "Nobody knows better than you that the road will be the hardest—the rockiest—I ever tried—if I can even walk on it at all."

"You can—and find the way smoothing out under your feet."

They went back to Miss Warren at last, their sense of guilt at their long desertion growing as they approached. But to their relief they found a cheerful lady just emerging from the old mansion, through which a proud and pleased caretaker had lingeringly shown her, both apparently quite content.

"And now," said Kirkwood, blithely, as he led his companions back to the car, "we'll have no more of solitude. I've a little programme for the evening which looks pretty good to me—I hope it will to you."

He took them to a wayside inn overlooking the river where they dined upon attractive food and rested in comfortable chairs upon a sheltered balcony until dusk and evening fell. At a moment when Kirkwood had left them Mary held a brief dialogue with her friend.

"It's all right, Sandy. Don't you see the difference in me?"

Alexandra, thus invited, scanned the face before her closely, while Mary smiled back at her.

"I see you still on tension, dear. I hope it's with a difference."

"All the difference in the world. There was no use being on tension before. There is now. I've got—something big to do."

"I'm very glad—if you are."

"Oh, I am. It's growing on me. I'm thrilled with it—

and a little frightened—but not much. Anyhow, it's a different sort of fright—like dreading to plunge off into cold water. But, if you can swim—it's only the plunge you're dreading—not being drowned."

Her friend might make what she could of this analogy, for Kirkwood was with them again. Things moved swiftly after that. They were in the car again, flying up the highway in the summer darkness lighted by a thousand lights. Then they were on the ferry, crossing a dusky river, with more lights all about reflected in the water, and the cooling breeze in their faces. Then the road again, in a procession of cars, and a long string of approaching headlights facing them. And at the end of the road their own car turned smoothly in between massive gateposts, lighted fantastically with great parti-coloured globes and hung with flowery garlands.

Kirkwood explained. "It's a big countryside festival—an annual affair given by the Ainsboroughs. Everybody is asked; there are no personal invitations sent out, except to close friends. There's everything doing all over the estate, and no rules, except that there must be no disorder. The society people think it a great lark—join in the entertaining, and seem to have the time of their lives performing in all sorts of shows for the crowd. There'll be a circus, for one thing—it'll be worth seeing, judging by last year."

"Do you know the Ainsboroughs?" Mary asked, a little dubiously, Kirkwood thought. He hastened to reassure her.

"I know two or three of them—the younger son pretty well. He writes a bit, and likes to hang around my office when the mood takes him. Nice chap. He first brought me up here two years ago. It's rather a fascinating carnival, take it on all sides. The music and the people are worth coming for, anyhow. I thought, after our serious afternoon and decorous dinner, you might enjoy letting out a little."

"I'm sure we should—if you think such clothes as these we're wearing will do."

"Oh, there's no dressing for this. You'll find your hosts in sports clothes, and only a few aspiring neighbours of the newly rich type wearing evening things. There'll be dancing in a pavilion—with a gorgeous orchestra——" He gave Mary Fletcher a laughing, penetrating glance. "Have you danced—once—in your college town?"

"Yes," said Mary—and smiled. "Once. Or twice. I forget which. I mean on two separate occasions."

"With the college faculty?"

She laughed outright, as a memory came to her. "Some of it. It dances—demurely."

"I'll wager it does. Well, a turn or two on the Ainsborough floor won't hurt you."

"I didn't know you danced."

"How should you?—knowing me only in an editorial capacity. To tell the truth, I was pretty well behind the times till an obliging girl at a place where I spent part of my vacation took me in hand. I assure you I know all the latest steps—up to a fortnight ago."

Mary's eyes were sparkling. Alexandra Warren's were like a girl's for interest. The scene they were approaching beckoned alluringly. The whole area enclosing the immense stretch of lawn lying immediately before the imposing house was given over to the various tents, stages, and smaller stands which at country fairs contain the various forms of entertainment; only in the present instance the performers, "barkers," food dispensers, and the rest were people of another class than those to be found in country fairs. Long strings of vari-coloured electric lamps made all as light as day; an expensive orchestra alternated with an amateur band in furnishing real music and an amusing imitation of the blare and boom of the rustic performers of remote regions. Every-

where were light and colour and gay sounds, shot through with laughter.

"Oh, this *is* a joy!" Mary exclaimed as an hour after their arrival the three came out of a great striped red-and-white marquee in which they had been watching several noteworthy people of much social distinction produce a bit of vaudeville not unworthy the professional stage. "I don't know when I've been so amused and charmed."

"That's partly because it really was a clever little show, and still more because it's so long since you've seen anything to satisfy the need of being amused and charmed," Kirkwood declared. "One reason why your imagination's gone stale —as you've said it has—is because you haven't had anything sparkling and scintillating to stimulate it.—But I didn't mean to lecture any more. Come—what do you say to a dance in that orange-and-gold pavilion? The music's enough to pull your feet over there in spite of yourself, isn't it?"

It seemed to Mary Fletcher that never in her life had she so wanted to dance! It took but a minute to find a pleasant spot in a sort of improvised balcony for the sitters-out and to establish Miss Warren there. Kirkwood had suddenly remembered to ask her, and even to urge her, against her smiling refusal, to give him the first dance. Released from all obligation he turned away with Mary, himself keener for the coming hour than it seemed to him he had ever been for any similar experience. To dance with Mary Fletcher—he didn't quite know what that was going to be. And yet he really hadn't much doubt that it might be a little better than a first reading of her best work!

After the first ten steps he had no doubt whatever. Where had she learned it? he wondered. Himself a late pupil of a most accomplished young person, as he had frankly confessed—a most fascinating young person also, as he had not

confessed—he yet found the author an artist in another line altogether.

"You're a wonder!" he murmured, with undisguised approval. His glance rested upon her with new absorption. "My word—I never knew anything quite equal to dancing with you. How does it happen? And how thankful I am for my late grooming. Otherwise I should have been stepping like a fatherly hippopotamus before your little feet—very likely stepping *on* them!"

"You dance beautifully," Mary assured him. Now indeed she was a new creature. As if it had been a wine which had gone to her head, the music was setting every pulse on fire. All in five circlings of the pavilion floor she had become a creature so radiant it seemed impossible that she could have been a partner in the sober discussions of the afternoon. Kirkwood looked down upon her and marvelled. Was it possible that he didn't even yet know Mary Fletcher as she really was?

"Where did you get it?" he asked again. "Not in editor's offices, nor in city libraries—nor in canteens in France."

"That's exactly where I did get it—in France. For months I was team-mate with a young French girl who was detailed to take me about the camps and canteens. She was a professional dancer, and she used to dance with and for the boys wherever we went. Naturally I learned a little from her."

"I should say you did. . . . Here we go again—Ah, this is a waltz. I always liked waltzes. They were more popular in my early dancing days than they are now. . . . Come, Mary—my dear——"

He was a trifle intoxicated himself, as bearing her away with him he caught Mary's low laugh. It was curious, he told himself, that such a hardened old fellow could be as exhilarated as any college boy with the sense of a lovely girl in his arms and the united rhythm of their swaying steps.

For that was what Mary seemed now, in spite of her years and honours—merely a lovely girl. And yet she had become, since morning, an actual and able partner of his in a serious and difficult enterprise, to which she was to lend herself, mind and soul, for at least the coming year. He had reason indeed for his headiness!

"I'm a lucky dog," said Mr. John Kirkwood to himself, as he skilfully guided this partner of his through the ever-increasing difficulties of a floor becoming more and more crowded. "And it's up to me to clinch things while the iron is hot—and the music's in our blood."

He led her away, when the waltz was over, and down a dimly lighted path through the shrubbery, already discovered by several other promenading couples. But he took care not to get beyond the magic of those inebriating violins.

"Mary," he said, when they had walked in silence for a minute or two, "when will you come back to town?"

She looked up in surprise. "Why, when my year with Aunt Sara is up."

"Do you think you can write that book—away from me?"

"You—you could come up and see me, now and then—couldn't you?" Her voice sounded a trifle abstracted. He thought perhaps her perceptions were still back there with the violins.

"Once in several weeks, perhaps—not oftener. Would that be enough? Think—of the plot of it—of the rush of it. Could you get into the spirit of it all, walking alone along your country roads—in November?"

"I shall have to try." Evidently she was disturbed. In the light of a great rose-and-blue Japanese lantern they were passing, her face showed sober again. He hated to take the light out of it, and yet he felt that if he could ever convince her that she must come back to be at her best, his chance was now.

"Remember," he bade her, "how you have struggled and worked in vain, up there in the country. The atmosphere there—for you—isn't the atmosphere you need. Do you venture to go back into it and stay? The psychology of it—the influence—the suggestion—they're all, just now, for you, of failure. Here, in the Big Town, they'll be all of success again. It's worth taking into account, isn't it?—Let me look you up another apartment, persuade Miss Warren to return with you, go back and let your nice little aunt give a farewell party for you, and then be settled in here for work by the first of October. Six months in the country is enough. Six months in the city will see you with the book half done.—Come—tell me I'm right. You know I am!"

Mary tried to say she wouldn't do it—she really tried. But the words wouldn't come. A sob rose in her throat—the violins were throbbing in a most seductive air—there was a hint of a cry in them, too. She had been through so much, during all these weeks and months, was so tired of the long, barren effort. This whole day had been such a contrast to all that—the warmth, the kindness of it—the friendly strength offered her to lean upon when she felt so weak. John Kirkwood's plan for her *was* a wonderful one, his scheme for work one to grip her from first to last. But to carry it out—wasn't he right?—that she must come back to town, where she could see him, consult with him, as often as she needed him. And wasn't—and perhaps this was the most compelling thought of all—wasn't it due him that if she accepted from him this great gift of an idea, with no conditions attached, she should do the task in his way, let him advise and suggest all through, as he could do only if she were close at hand?

"Please say you will," said Kirkwood's persuasive voice in her ear. "Say you will, even if you can't wholly see it. I promise you, you shan't regret it."

So Mary promised—with a queer little sinking of the heart

she couldn't wholly account for. But Kirkwood, after his first joyful outbreak—"You little trump—*now* I promise you more! I promise you, you shall *win!*"—left her no time for reconsideration or regret, but took her back to the pavilion. Here, with the first strains of the most alluring dance music of that season, he quite literally swept her off her feet. For him it was indeed a dance of triumph.

Back at their hotel, hours later, Alexandra and Mary found a slip under their door announcing the arrival of a special delivery letter for Miss Fletcher at the office below. At Mary's order it was sent up. It bore the Newcomb postmark, but the handwriting was one Mary didn't recall. With some anxiety she opened it, to find within a few lines only, above a familiar name. Somehow the very sight of that name seemed strange to her, here, at the close of the day she had just passed.

DEAR MARY FLETCHER:

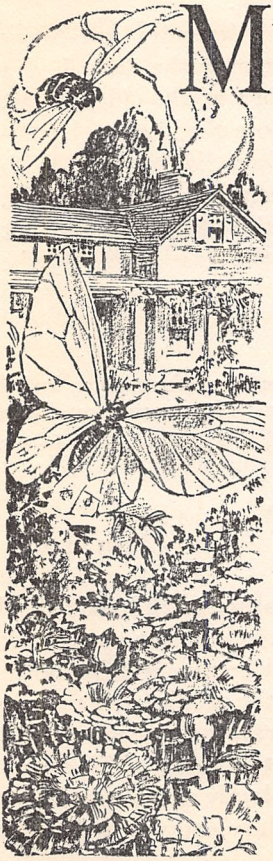
I understand that your ship has reached port for repairs, and I am hoping they may be effective in putting her into perfect condition for many successful voyages. But somehow, though I can't conceive being needed just now, I can't help standing by, as I told you I should, just outside the harbour.

Yours, as ever,
MARK FENN.

As she read the words, in a clear, rather small hand full of character, the strange little sinking of the heart came back most unexpectedly. And presently it became a well-defined ache in the throat. But the origin of the ache seemed to have nothing to do with the writer of this rather singular message. It was connected more closely with the image of Miss Sara Graham. Mary could see her quite plainly as she would look when she was told that the year of Mary's stay with her had ended with six months!

## CHAPTER VII

### Forks and Spoons



"MARK, it's the first of September. Do you know what that means?"

Harriet Fenn spoke across the breakfast table. Her tone was so decidedly that of one making an important announcement that Mark looked up for an instant from scanning the morning headlines.

"Is it a crisis of some sort?" he inquired, without deep interest.

"It certainly is. It's the day we always begin the fall housecleaning."

A smothered ejaculation was followed by a remonstrance. "It doesn't have to begin to-day. Besides, it's too hot."

"It has to begin to-day," declared Harriet firmly. "Do you realize that high school opens on the eighth this year? That gives me all too little time, at best. And as I can't get a woman to help me, and as we couldn't afford to have one for a week at three dollars a day anyway, I'll have to depend on you. I'm going to begin in your study. Every book has to come off those shelves——"

"That's not necessary. We took them all down last year."

"We didn't take them down last year. You acted like such a bear about it I agreed to letting them go with a dusting shelf by shelf. This year those shelves have got to be cleaned properly, if I do it alone. The room smells musty, and it's because those books need airing."

Mark groaned. But it was easy enough to see that there was no way out for him. When Harriet laid down the law after this fashion it was small use for a mere man to rebel. The next hour, therefore, found him coatless and collarless, wearing a pair of old trousers, his shirt sleeves rolled up, carrying rows upon rows of books out upon the front porch. He had been instructed with care in the technique of the operation, which was to seize each book by the covers and vigorously open and close it several times in succession. It had then to be polished off with a dustcloth. The worst of it was, to Mark's thinking, that even then the cleansing process wasn't considered by Harriet complete, for the dustcloth had to come into use a second time, when the book was set upon the shelves, lest its stay upon the porch had caused it to acquire a fresh coating.

"If that's not a work of supererogation, I never saw one," the labourer declared, somewhat testily, when Harriet, having caught him dusting at one swoop as many of the volumes as he could hold in one hand, expostulated vigorously. "If they've got to get it again individually when they go in, what's the use of fussing about 'em one by one out here?"

"Because even so they're not thoroughly clean. You don't want your study to smell like an antique shop, do you?"

"I like that booky smell myself," Mark announced. Nevertheless, he returned to Harriet's methods—at least while her eye was upon him. He worked industriously enough, for the most part, though now and then a book whose contents

were unfamiliar caught his eye, and he sneaked a page or two of reading, his ear upon the sounds within.

He spent a busy week. Nothing short of perfection would suit Harriet, whose housekeeping methods were as thorough as those of her teaching. Toward its close, having sent her brother to the attic with a bundle of goods and waiting in vain for him to return, she followed after. She found Mark sitting on an ancient footstool, before a box of yellowing letters, completely absorbed in their contents. The words of hurried recall died upon her lips as he looked up, for his face was full of eagerness.

"I've found a bundle of Father's letters I've never seen before," he said. "They're perfectly great. I never realized quite so thoroughly what a clear, crisp style he had. Why, instead of sounding like a letter from one of the old fellows it might be any live young instructor in love with his job—if such an anomaly could be found. Listen to this——"

He would have read on and on, after that first one, if Harriet, her energies mastering her emotions, had not recalled him to his task.

"Bring them down, my dear, and stow them in your fireplace cupboard. Some evening we'll read them together. But just now—when I'm hustling to get through——"

"All right. What's the next job?"

"Beating the rugs. They're all on the back porch. When they're done, I'll let you off."

"Heaven be praised!" And Mark followed his sister's blue-gingham skirts down the narrow stairs with the sensations of a small boy about to be let out for a holiday, after one more row of hoeing across a stony field.

He was staggering back to the house, an hour or more later, under a heavy burden of cleaned rugs and bits of carpet, when a blithe, unexpected voice hailed him.

"Nothing I've seen in a year does me so much good as this.

Professor Mark Fenn, without his collar, and his hair in frightful disorder! I know it's unkind of me but I'm *so* glad to have my friend meet you this way *first*."

It was wicked of Mary Fletcher, but she hadn't been able to resist the temptation. Herself in the trimmest order, to the tight little dotted veil which held every hair in place under her smart small hat, she was laughing across a gay border of scarlet and orange zinnias at the figure presented by Miss Graham's neighbour. Beside her stood Alexandra Warren, equally trim, also smiling, though with a polite reserve of decided contrast to Mary's frank delight.

The bale of rugs went down with a slump, and Mark's grimy hand thrust back heavy locks from a damp forehead, as he stood still to look, then came forward without too evident reluctance.

"It certainly is unkind," he agreed heartily, "and I know of no way to punish you adequately—except by insisting on shaking hands with you."

Mary put out a determined hand, from which he drew back.

"Shake!" she commanded.

"Never."

"Then let me present you to Miss Warren. She's been seeing you in her mind's eye as a stern, scholastic figure hewn from granite. This is going to give that preconceived impression an awful blow."

"I hope so. I can conceive of no situation likely to accomplish that end more thoroughly."

"Mark!" cried a voice from the rear of the house.

"That's Harriet. Call her out, please!" demanded Mary.

"With pleasure—" and Mark's own eyes sparkled. Here was revenge on Harriet for this week of slave-driving.

But even in her working garb Harriet presented a picture of well-ordered efficiency. Her blue gingham was not disreputably unclean, for it had been covered by a big apron which

she hurriedly untied as she saw her fate, dropping it upon the porch. Also she drew working gloves from her firm, strong hands and let them fall upon the apron. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes bright, her welcoming smile unembarrassed. The daughter of David Matthew Fenn was seldom shaken from her poise; it wasn't in her code to show distress over such a simple matter as being caught at work by a stranger.

Alexandra Warren had not often been more interested in any pair of people than she frankly confessed herself to be at once in this brother and sister.

"Why," she said to Mary, some time later in the day, when the two were alone together, "they struck me as the most genuine people I've seen in a year. It really was dreadful of you to make them meet us just then, but they didn't even wince—visibly. I liked their faces—even with a streak of dirt across the Professor's chin."

"He hadn't shaved this morning, either," Mary exulted. "His face was blue as well as dirty. Oh, I know I'm horrid to want to take him down, but if you knew how superior he can be——"

"I fancy he *is* superior."

"He certainly is. But I don't like to have him make me feel it. Of course"—Mary recalled one or two things at this point which forced her in justice to alter her tone—"of course he can be very kind—and he has been. But—there are moments when he lacks fascination."

Alexandra laughed. "Fascination!" she repeated. "I should hope he did. I particularly dislike the word in connection with any real man."

"You'd rather have him blunt and disagreeable, I suppose."

"Decidedly rather, now and then, at least."

"I hope you'll have the opportunity to catch him being both," Mary declared, "though he'll probably be on his guard with you. In one short week there won't be much

chance for either of you to get to know the other as I know you both. But we'll do our best to bring it about."

She fulfilled her promise. In various ways during that week she managed to throw Mark Fenn and Alexandra Warren together. For her guest she planned a luncheon, a lawn party, and a dinner, and as the people whom she invited to these affairs promptly responded with invitations in return, the time was crowded full. Miss Graham was kept so busy helping Mary play hostess that she hadn't time to sit down and realize her own severe disappointment over her niece's decision to return to the city by the first of October.

By the end of the week Alexandra was feeling thoroughly at home in the atmosphere of the college town, where she had reciprocated warmly every effort made for her entertainment. She had met the Fenns at several of the affairs arranged for her and her acquaintance with them had progressed far more rapidly than had Mary's own—at least, so Mary herself assured her.

"You've seen more of them in this week than I have in any month since I came," Mary asserted, as the two were dressing in adjoining rooms for a small dinner which Harriet was giving in honour of them both. "I never knew them to bloom out into such festivity. I don't believe Harriet has given a formal dinner before in all the days of her life."

"She isn't giving one now," Alexandra protested. "She said distinctly that she wasn't capable of any formal entertaining. She wanted us to come over for dinner to-night. That's quite different."

"Not a bit different; it's only her provincial way of putting it. As a matter of fact they never have dinner at night, they call it supper. Oh, no, you're quite mistaken—Harriet means it for the real thing. I shouldn't be surprised if she has as big a party as she can get into her small dining-room."

"But even so—you're not going to wear that, are you, my

dear?" Alexandra was looking in astonishment at her friend, who at the moment appeared in her doorway with a fluff of rose-and-amber tulle descending over her head to settle lightly upon her bare shoulders and but slightly to conceal them.

"Why not?"

"Why—if the occasion is as informal as Miss Fenn gave me to understand, you'll be all alone in a frock like that. By the way—I don't seem to know that frock! Did you bring it from Paris?"

"Bought it in New York last week, when you weren't looking. I've been dying to wear it ever since. Isn't it a dream?"

"It's lovely, of course. But at none of these parties this week have I seen anything so very décolletée. Are you sure——"

"Oh, I'm simply wild to do something out of the common," Mary declared, with a mischievous glance, as she continued to adjust the details of her attire. "I've worn all my demurest things, like the rest of you, all the week. Even at Aunt Sara's own dinner I put on dull feathers, like a pigeon, to match you. To-night I want to make people sit up. The very incongruity of appearing in the little brown house in a frivolous frock like this is what fascinates me! Don't you see?"

"I'm afraid you'll disconcert your hostess."

But Mary only laughed, and coming through into the guest's room pirouetted about it, humming a gay strain.

"Oh, how I'd like to be going to a dance, instead!" she cried. "What—the gray crêpe again? It's a dear and becomes you, but I wish it were cut a trifle lower! Your neck's so lovely, it's a pity to show only a sample of it, like that."

"A whole circle of it, front and back, is quite enough, to my way of thinking," said Alexandra decidedly. "And I

want you to know that this gown was made very specially for me, by a dressmaker whom even you must respect—only I've forgotten her name at the moment——"

"It was so long ago?" Mary suggested wickedly. "Forgive me—it's beautifully smart, and you are perfect in it, with your splendid hair done that way. I've been so proud of you all the week. Only I *should* like, just for to-night, a stunning thin black of some sort, with a smashing flame-coloured fan——"

"Since I don't own a stunning thin black, at present, nor a flame-coloured fan—which would be horrible with my red hair——"

"Your hair isn't red; it's a wonderful dark auburn, as you very well know. And you're absolutely all right—so long as you don't frown on my French frock and my shoulders. To tell the truth, I want to startle Mark and Harriet—they need it. Besides"— and here Mary paused, to proceed after a minute with deliberate play for effect—"besides—I won't say I'm not a bit jealous! You've been so astonishingly successful, all the week, in keeping everybody interested in you, I've had to retire to the background. Now, being intensely egoistic, I don't like the background a bit, and I don't intend to stay in it. So behold—*Enter Mary, centre stage, in evening dress. She comes down to front while Alexandra slowly retires to left back.*—Oh, you dear!"—Mary left off, laughing, to hug her friend— "You know I don't mean it. As I said before, I've been prouder than Punch of you. You're so distinguished-looking beside all the frumpy college people——"

"Mary! Take it back! It's they who look distinguished —so much so, some of them, that it doesn't matter at all what they wear. Besides, many of them do wear very charming clothes. The wife of the President——"

"*She* doesn't wear charming clothes, Sandy—you're crazy!"

"Very well, then—she doesn't need to. That fine intellectual face is at its best above just those plain, dark gowns."

Mary shook her head. "I do believe you've fallen in love with this old town—and everybody in it."

"I admit it," declared Alexandra promptly.

Over in the brown house Harriet Fenn had been working hard and fast to complete her preparations. An hour before the guests were expected she called Mark to inspect her table. He had been down in the cellar turning the handle of an ice-cream freezer, the last of many duties which had been his this day. The Fenns were among the people who do things for themselves on all occasions, for lack of means to hire them done. Harriet's dinner was of her own construction; though by no means elaborate it had cost her two days of ceaseless energy.

"How do you think it looks?" she questioned, with some anxiety.

"Mighty well." Mark's eye roved over the narrow, old-fashioned table, lengthened to its limit. "It looks like every other dressed-up table, to me. I suppose that's what you want."

"Of course it is, though I'm afraid I can't quite achieve it, with our things. *Would* you notice where the tablecloth is pieced? I made it come right where you carve, so the tray-cloth would cover most of it."

"Never'd see it in the world."

"We haven't a dozen of *anything*. But I will not borrow, though Miss Graham offered me anything she has. Her silver's so beautiful I really was tempted—but——"

"I'm glad you didn't take it," Mark declared with some sternness. "If we can't entertain on our own stuff we won't do it at all."

"That's my feeling about it—though when it came to find-

ing enough plates for four courses I was hard put to it. Never mind—the company will make up for the china. We've never had President Wing before, but I'm not a bit afraid of him, nor of sensible, kind Mrs. Wing, though it's the women who will see every little makeshift.—And of course Mary and Miss Warren——"

"Let 'em see. As for Mary and Miss Warren——Oh, see here, Harry—I wouldn't have expected *you* to get nervous at the last minute, this way. The table looks like the banquet table of the gods to me. If any of the goddesses don't like sitting in chairs that don't match they can summon their attendants and go back home."

Harriet's anxious expression relaxed. "That sounds just like Father," she said. "He never would let us fuss about appearances. And I do know it's a good dinner I've prepared, which is the most important thing. Run along and dress, Marky. I'm going to put Miss Warren on your left. Of course Mrs. Wing must sit on your right—and you're not to forget to give her half your attention."

"Yes, *ma'am*," promised her brother, with a meekness belied by the gleam in his eye. "And where are you putting Mary—if I may ask?"

"As far away from you as I can place her," replied Harriet, firmly. "You and she don't get on at all, lately, and I'll not have you striking sparks all through this dinner."

Mark frowned. "As she's leaving day after to-morrow, you needn't labour too hard to keep us apart. See here,"—and he turned back to make a journey round the long table, Harriet following protestingly at his elbow—"I'm going to shift things a bit." He picked up the plain little place card which designated Mary Fletcher's assignment. "She can change with Mrs. Somers, and come up next Hamilton. Then my end of the table will be livelier and yours more dignified."

"Mark! That throws everything out! I want Mary next President Wing, she amuses him so."

"Let him amuse himself with Mrs. Somers. He doesn't know the faculty wives any too well."

Harriet couldn't do anything with him and was obliged to let his changes stand. When Mark asserted himself it was useless to oppose him. He went off to dress with a parting command to her not to bother her head about anything, because things were in train for a successful evening—and should he wear a white tie or a black one?

"Black, of course—with your dinner jacket," she reminded him. "You *never* remember! That poor coat—the silk's beginning to wear through."

"Let it wear. When it's done I'll take to tails for all occasions, like Somers. It's wild extravagance of me to have two dress coats, anyhow, if one *is* descended from Father. Dear old Dad—remember how excited we were when he got it first—and how impressive he looked in it?"

"Yes." Harriet's anxious expression turned to a tender one. "But the tails are much too short for you now—and that's why I'm thankful the other coat fills so many places. Be sure to get the right collar, dear!"

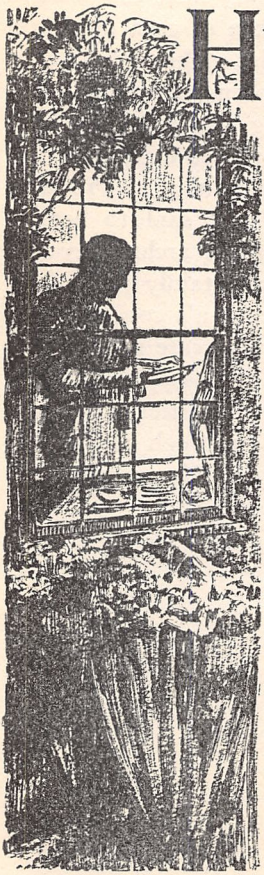
"I'll try. But—it's easy to 'mix them childern up!'" And Mark departed in leaps up the short, steep staircase to the small room which had been his since boyhood. He was feeling a peculiar excitement himself at thought of entertaining under his own unimposing roof the decidedly imposing group of guests whom Harriet had selected. Among them was one in particular, lately added to the college faculty, of whom they were all exceedingly proud—a tall, lanky, plain-faced Englishman, an Oxford man, a gentleman and a scholar, whose name added lustre to their lists, and whose actual presence, in the college or out of it, gave enjoyment. In moving Mary's place card Fenn had had in mind not

only his own pleasure, but the advantage of having Mary meet this bright particular star of the college firmament. Professor Chilton had but this day returned to the town from his English home to begin his second year at Newcomb; Mark had met him on the street and impulsively invited him to the dinner without waiting to consult Harriet. She had been both honoured and a little fluttered at the news; it had certainly not occurred to her to place Mary next this learned man, though she had heard him spoken of as a delightful companion. As she reviewed the order of her guests once more, when she had dressed and, big apron tied over her simple finery, was attending to finishing touches, she noted again with regret the arrangement Mark had made.

"With all her cleverness, Mary'll not fit in at Professor Chilton's end of the table—at all," she said to herself. "Now Mrs. Somers is really interested in archæology and could talk with him intelligently. It certainly shows how little judgment a man has when a woman's concerned—if she can entertain him he doesn't seem to care much about her brains! Yet, of course, Mary has brains, splendid ones. . . . Oh, I'm glad I don't give dinner parties every day! Much easier to take a high-school class through the hardest parts of Cæsar than to make sure everybody has a good time at an affair like this."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A Partial Eclipse



HARRIET removed her apron in haste and left the table standing in its unwonted glory, for she had caught a glimpse of Miss Graham and her two guests approaching across the lawn. A minute later, the sight of Mary Fletcher, in her mists of rose-and-amber tulle, made her soberly gowned hostess catch her breath.

"Why—Mary!" she breathed.

"Am I too much dressed for your party, Harriet?" laughed Mary. "Aunt Sara and even Sandy Warren say I am. But I wanted to do special honour to the occasion—and show you my prettiest frock besides. Don't send me home to change, will you?"

"I should say not," declared a voice from the stairs above them, as Mark Fenn came running down. "We don't often catch sight of anything so alluring."

But his eye left her to dwell upon the less striking figure of Alexandra Warren, whose appearance, none the less, left little to be desired. The

gray crêpe, of which Mary had spoken so slightingly, was really an exquisite creation and suited her perfectly; to both Harriet and Mark Fenn she seemed faultlessly dressed—as she was—and her bearing had already charmed them; all the week they had noted it. Her pleasure in the college town and in the acquaintances she had made had been so frankly evident that it had won for her a welcome as cordial as it was unconstrained.

When Harriet's guests had all assembled in the none-too-large "parlour" of the little brown house, they elbowed one another rather closely. This room lay across the hall from Mark's study, was seldom used, and was unquestionably a stiff and formal apartment. The one really good and unquestionably rare thing the room contained was a piece of old Lowestoft china upon the white chimneypiece, among a collection of odd articles neither beautiful nor worthy of their high position. Whatever else were Harriet's capabilities—and they were many—they didn't include the making the most of her small resources in the matter of home decoration. Mary's fingers fairly ached to reform that room, with its marble-topped centre table, its ugly black-walnut chairs, its gilt-framed steel engravings.

"I couldn't have spent six months in *this* house," she said to herself, as she seemed to listen, smiling and intelligent, to the remarks of Professor Somers on the value of mathematics as a discipline for the unruly mind. "No wonder people grow old ungracefully in such surroundings. Just one colourfully shaded electric lamp in this room instead of that horror with the black marble base would make all the difference."

When presently the company went out to dinner Mary's quick eye noted everything. The long, narrow table, placed obliquely in the small dining-room in order to gain space, its outfittings of ill-matched china, its obvious substitutions in

the way of silver and glass—these the writer's observant memory stored promptly away. She looked up and down the row of faces on the opposite side of the table and admitted to herself that they were the faces of educated people, well bred and by no means uninteresting, and that none of them seemed to be taking the slightest note of the forks they ate with or the glasses they drank from. That they were enjoying Harriet's appetizing food couldn't be doubted—Mary was enjoying it herself. But the refinements of table service still seemed to her indispensable; and the necessity for the hostess's constant goings and comings as she left her place to serve her guests a confession of lack of means so incongruous with decorous dining as to seem ridiculous.

Across the table, however, she presently found an interesting study which effectually diverted her attention from Harriet's homely style of hospitality. Alexandra Warren, placed between Mark Fenn and the plain-faced Englishman from Oxford University, was sparkling as Mary had not quite known her friend could sparkle. The week's vacation had done Alexandra a world of good; her finely modelled features were glowing with health and vivacity of expression; her well-filled mind was leaping to respond to the challenge of the men to right and left of her, by whom she was alternately engaged in conversation. Very evidently they both were deriving much pleasure from her companionship, and Mary thought she detected that each in his turn released her to the other with reluctance.

"Dear old Sandy, she's having the time of her life," said Mary heartily to herself—in the early stages of the dinner. As time went on, however, she was conscious of a strange sense of envy as she watched her friend's success. She was accustomed to think of Alexandra as a remarkably fine woman, several years too old to be called young, whose chief asset was her knowledge of books, and whose chief desire

was to be a friend to Mary herself. That the well-trained city librarian could be a real attraction to men of intellect, except as she might aid them in their search for material, was a quite new idea. Often Mary had watched Alexandra walking among rows of bookstacks, some well-known literary man or scientist at her elbow, a figure of competence on her own ground, to be consulted with deference as one who knew that ground as a whole more thoroughly than they. But here, at the dinner tables of the Newcomb people, Mary had not expected her accomplished friend to make such a palpable hit. The queer thing about it was that Mary herself couldn't seem altogether pleased.

It looked as if their sober tastes preferred gray crêpe to rose-and-amber tulle! It was true that both Mark Fenn and Professor Chilton looked across the table, from time to time, at Mary herself, and now and then courteously made the talk at that end of the narrow table general. But the astonishing fact remained that it was with Alexandra Warren that they were preoccupied—and with reason. Mary hadn't dreamed that Alexandra had it in her to be socially expert to quite such a degree.

For herself, Mary was forced to make the most of Edgar Hamilton, an instructor in chemistry, on the one side, and Professor Somers, the mathematics man, on the other. Long before the dinner ended she was mortally weary of them both. It struck her quite suddenly that Mark Fenn, in his capacity of host, was playing the part with much more urbanity than she had known him capable of—and that she had never seen him look so little at loose ends. In Harriet's candlelight her brother's dinner coat didn't betray its worn lapels; the snug white collar and well-tied black bow beneath the sturdy chin were very becoming; one could hardly visualize him as a man-of-all-work, beating rugs! As for the Englishman—Mary acknowledged in her own mind that he was a foeman

worthy of any woman's steel, and that it was lucky he was next Alexandra since she—Mary herself—could never in the world have played up to such a combination of erudition, modesty, and personality, or have followed his kindly lead as, without seeming effort, Alexandra was doing.

The last coffee cup had been drained, the last guest had risen from the table. There were no cigars in the house; it hadn't occurred to Harriet to remind Mark to provide any. His old pipe she was accustomed to tolerate, but further than the coffee her list of supplies hadn't gone. Mark himself thought of it—too late, and with the other men followed the women back to the front of the house recognizing rather ruefully that he and Harriet didn't know how to do things according to modern ideas. And just what they were to do with their guests in the small parlour for the remainder of the evening he didn't quite know.

The question was unexpectedly solved for him by the early departure of President and Mrs. Wing and of several other married pairs. It turned out that Harriet had hit upon an evening devoted to an important college business meeting, and the guests who were members of a certain committee took apologetic leave, their wives departing with them. This left the small rooms uncrowded. Some chance now for a bit of gaiety, Mary reflected. It was time for something livelier than literary conversation.

She couldn't get away from Edgar Hamilton. He was much the youngest man present, and he had been obviously attracted to her from their first meeting He had followed her closely and now cornered her again in the little parlour, eager to continue the talk begun at the dinner table. Mary, however, soon contrived her escape, it being by no means her will to allow Alexandra to usurp all the most desirable attention to be had that evening. Where *was* Alexandra, anyhow?

"This is such a tiny room—I think Professor Fenn's study is larger. Shan't we go across?" Mary suggested. "He has a very large library—have you seen it?"

"I haven't. One wouldn't think a very large library could be got into a house of this size. In fact I've never been in Fenn's house before. He and I aren't much associated, naturally," explained the young instructor in chemistry, rather condescendingly.

They strolled out of the parlour, into the narrow hall, and came to a standstill at the door of the study.

"Why, Sandy Warren!" The exclamation was only imaginary and therefore inaudible, but Mary felt like shouting it. For the first time in her remembrance she was suddenly and disconcertingly attacked by actual jealousy. In her rose-and-amber, her beautiful shoulders a beckoning challenge, her cheeks touched with enchanting colour, Mary Fletcher stood attended only by an undesirable, over-devoted young man in whom she had no interest whatever, and looked in upon a scene which would have held any eyes.

In the demure gray crêpe showing only a modicum of the well-modelled neck and the fair flesh below, the heavy rich-hued hair swept chastely back from the fine forehead, the whole spirited face alight with interest and charm, Alexandra was continuing to hold sway over the two men who had spent the dinner hours beside her. The three were deep in a discussion. Piles of books had been taken down from the loaded shelves and lay about upon chairs and floor. In Alexandra's lap, as she sat upon an old-fashioned footstool close by certain lower shelves from which books had been withdrawn, lay a big, shabby volume over which her head was bent. And bending with hers were two other heads, one dark, one sandy, all apparently absorbed in the page before them. Mark Fenn was kneeling close beside her, the better to see whatever it was which so interested him. And as Mary and young

Hamilton looked, Professor Chilton's voice, in its pleasant Oxonian inflections, said warmly, "You are right—you are quite right, Miss Warren. It was a point upon which I should have said there could be no doubt, but you have shown us that doubt in this connection is not only reasonable, it is inescapable. These inscriptions prove nothing, as you say, but they do show the fallibility of human judgment. It is a most interesting suggestion you have made—*most* interesting!"

"Good Lord!" Edgar Hamilton jerked it out under his breath. "There's nothing later than the Pyramids here! Let's go back. We don't know enough to stay."

But Mary delayed, fascinated, watching. The three at the other side of the room seemed entirely unaware of the new arrivals. Alexandra closed the book, and Mark took it from her and replaced it upon the shelves. His face had never looked, to Mary, so stirred and eager. He had thrust his hand more than once through his thick locks, as their slight disorder showed—always, as Mary remembered it, a sign of absorption in whatever he was considering. And as she looked he broke into a boyish laugh.

"We'll have to concede," he said triumphantly to the Englishman, plunging his hands into his pockets precisely as a pleased boy might, "that she has us both. I thought I knew—I was sure you knew—but—that last fact she produced was a facer! The honours are with the lady!"

"Unquestionably," agreed Professor Chilton, with his homely, friendly smile. "And deservedly so. Only careful and painstaking research——"

Here Alexandra rose to her feet, with a gesture of deprecation. "Please!" she said, protestingly. "It's only by the merest chance that I came upon that fact. The library has many letters sent it with inquiries or statements from great scholars. Sometimes the strangest bits of information

come into my hands—things I don't understand the value of at all. Once in a while such a striking piece of news of a late discovery as this stays in my mind—I bring it forth in the company of such an expert as Professor Chilton, and"—her smile was adorable, and both men smiled back at her in appreciation of her candour—"then I produce a big effect with small means—as a small boy fires a giant firecracker with a little match. The roar overwhelms even himself!"

And now laughter, and great friendliness, and a clever story or two—it was the conclusion of a sympathetic *camaraderie* to which Mary hadn't much clue. Of course she and young Hamilton didn't remain standing in the doorway looking on; they had moved into the room at Mary's instance, and were surveying the bookshelves on the opposite side of the room. Hamilton, not to be outdone by his elders, took down a book and read something out of it to Mary—she never knew what. Altogether, she began to think that the evening would be over without Mark Fenn's recognition that the person to whom he had offered to be a friend in need had really been present at all.

At last she found him with her.

"I want you to know," said his cordial voice, "how much I like—how much we all like—and admire—your friend. She's a remarkable woman. We've been seeing it ever since she came, but to-night she's fairly amazed us. She has one of the brightest minds I've come in contact with in many a day. Why, any woman who could keep Chilton interested for so long as she has, has scored a triumph. He's always scrupulously polite, but those of us who know him at all know when he's really awakened by an exchange of views that delights him, and he certainly has been that to-night. We're sorry you're going so soon."

"I knew you'd appreciate my friend when you knew her,"

said Mary, trying her best to speak naturally in spite of her displeasure with him. "She's been in the library so many, many years, of course she's absorbed an enormous amount of knowledge and can put idiots like me to blush. I'm really awfully proud of her and I'm so glad you have the sense to see how learned she is."

"I don't imagine she thinks herself learned," Mark answered with a smile. "She can't be old enough to have been so very 'many, many years' in a library like that one. Her education's been broad rather than intensive, yet she shows expert knowledge now and then that's quite startling. I'm afraid," he added, "we rather monopolized her."

"Oh, not at all. I wanted so much to have her have a good time up here; she has so few chances, outside of her work, to meet interesting people. It was a new experience for her, away from her library, to talk so long with two such men—I could see how she enjoyed it."

Mary had the grace to be ashamed of that speech the moment it was spoken, but there was no use trying to amend it. "*Cat!*" she said to herself, as she caught Mark's look suggesting that he didn't know quite what to make of her. She said it again, more than once, before the evening ended, and it kept her annoyance from showing again so flagrantly. But it wasn't a happy evening, behave as well as she might.

"Let's walk a little, it's such a lovely night," Mary begged Alexandra as they left the house. "Just up and down the garden. I don't feel like sleep, do you?"

"Not a bit; I'd love to walk—if we can, in these high heels."

"We'll just stroll. We've been in that stuffy little house so long we need it."

"The windows were all open—I didn't notice its stuffiness," said Alexandra. "It's a dear house—it has so much character, like the people in it."

"Character! Why, of all the ugly rooms, that place they

call the parlour is the ugliest. And the dining-room—funny little low ceiling; and that narrow table—like a picnic affair in a grove."

As she spoke Mary caught her floating draperies on a tall stalk in a garden bed, and had to free herself. "I caught it twice to-night, on something on the splintery old chair I sat in at dinner," she recalled. "Serves me right, I suppose, for wearing a civilized frock in a primitive dwelling."

Alexandra Warren stopped short, amazedly regarding her friend in the September moonlight. "Why, I thought the house and everybody in it perfectly delightful."

"Of course you did. You had a ripping time—with your archæologist and your psychologist—the gayest company in the world, of course—to you. But it was dull as ditch water to me, marooned with mathematics and chemistry. I thought chemistry would be the death of me—I couldn't get away from him. I felt like a baby with my bare shoulders, of course—the only one—and you so decorously charming across the table. Oh, this stupid town—I *shall* be glad to get away from it!"

"I wish I could stay in it! Why, Mary—I don't believe you half appreciate it all. Just the way you speak about that house——" Her voice was low; at this point in their walk they were not far from the house next door, the light from whose open windows shone out upon their path. "Don't you realize that that house is the home of a scholar—and of a scholar before him? What does a narrow dining-table matter when you remember the rows on rows of books on those shelves in that study? *They* tell the story of the tastes of the people who live there. I don't know when I've seen a finer collection. Few leather bindings, to be sure—but priceless contents, and so catholic a list there's not much worth having you can't find there. And the portrait of that splendid father giving point and purpose to it all. Oh, I was

delighted with the Fenns, Mary—I have been, from the hour I met them. Talk of atmosphere—put *them* into your book, and you'll have an atmosphere that's as tonic as mountain air. It's good—so good—to breathe air like that. I shall be the better for it all the year."

Mary was silent. It seemed to her she hardly knew Alexandra to-night, she was so transformed by what, to Mary herself, had been a week of only moderately enjoyable experience, ending with the least satisfying of all. The two passed slowly along together, one moody, the other exalted.

Suddenly Mary paused. "There are your heroes," she whispered. "Give them a good look. The atmosphere you like so much is thickening. I can almost smell the dish water. Don't you want to go in and help?"

Against the ruddy light from a lamp two figures were partially outlined in the oblong of a kitchen window. Only Harriet's energetic shoulder and arm could be descried, as she washed dishes with despatch, but the whole of Mark's head and body stood out like a silhouette. Coat off, apron on, he was drying plates and cups with an expedition which spoke of long training.

"I *should* like to go in and help," Alexandra whispered eagerly back. "There must be piles of things. I suppose it wouldn't be possible."

"I presume they'd welcome you—in your gray crêpe. Shall I come too and do the kettles? I haven't so much on to get smudged! But of course they're talking us over. We should interrupt the best part of the party—for them!"

Alexandra Warren turned and took her sulky, cynical friend by those bare shoulders, which in the warm September night Mary hadn't bothered to cover except by a gossamer scarf which mostly floated to the gentle breeze.

"Mary Fletcher," she breathed, "it's not like you to be so snobbish.—And let me tell you—I haven't quite realized

till to-night what a mistake you may be making in coming back down with me. Don't you know these people are worth their weight in gold? Where in the world will you find things better worth writing about than right here?"

Mary flung away from her. She threw up one arm in a passionate gesture toward the open, ruddy window.

"Behold!" she cried, under her breath. "The perfect hero and his incomparable sister! No need to search further. Life as it should be lived—among the books and—dishes! How fine the values—how broad the understanding!—Oh!"—she struck her hands together softly—"I'm a fool, of course, not to recognize my material when I see it. But somehow—I—prefer—life as it *is* lived, by people in the thick of things—not cloistered—like this! And I'm going back to it. I'd like to start to-night."

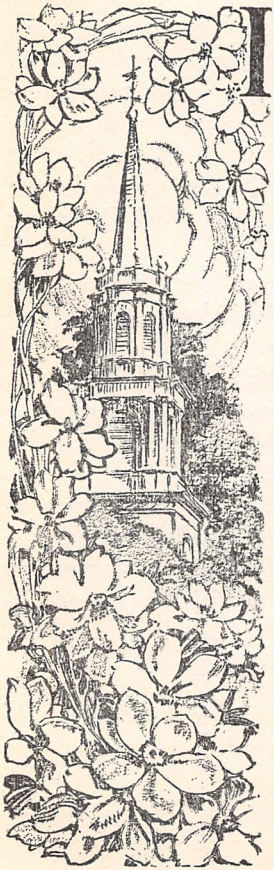
Alexandra shook her head. She put her arm through Mary's and gently drew her, petulantly resisting, away from all view of the Fenns' kitchen window.

"Yes, I think you'll have to go," she admitted, presently, as they paced on. "But maybe, sometime, you'll want to come back. The tragedy of life is that we don't recognize the best hours in it—till they're past."

Mary laughed—not very mirthfully. "Do you know what I think, you solemn dear? Without at all realizing it—you've quite lost your head to-night. Maybe something still more valuable—and vulnerable. Which was it—archæology—or psychology?"

## CHAPTER IX

### White Anemones



IT WAS another Mary who came downstairs next morning. Simply dressed, quiet of manner, she greeted Miss Graham, who came to meet her at the threshold of the dining-room, both hands outstretched. The elder woman spoke first.

"It's such a beautiful Sunday morning, dear—I'm so glad. I've been watching Harriet and Mark pick all their white fall anemones; Mark took them all away—a great armful. I'm sure we'll find them at the church. It's like their thoughtfulness. Harriet has had them there every year, under the tablet."

One would hardly have known Mary Fletcher, Alexandra Warren thought, as the three women sat at breakfast. The restless mood which had been hers so much of late had given place to one so subdued and gentle that it altered the very expression upon her face. She said little, and after breakfast disappeared until church time; the others knew where she had gone. Five years ago to-day,

in Italy, had occurred the fatal accident which had taken away both father and mother from Mary's life. Up in the old village cemetery lay their mortal remains, marked by a massive gray stone.

Mary came in, by and by; she had covered the resting places with the flowers from Miss Graham's garden: asters, pink and white and purple. Her face was grave, but there were no traces of tears in her eyes.

"Somehow I can't make them real, at all," she said to Alexandra before they left the house for church. The two stood together in the drawing-room before the portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Fletcher, done by a painter of renown. "My life, these five years, has been crowded so full; the old days at the school, before I went away from home to college, seem so far off. It seems so much longer that they've been gone. I wish I could feel it more—to-day."

"Perhaps you will, dear, before the day is over. Such a father and mother must have meant very much to you—more than you know. What fine faces—how much character and beauty of living show in them!"

"Father's is that of the leader he was, isn't it? I remember how proud I was of him, always, when people looked at him, in any public place. And Mother—she was always looked at and watched, too, she was so beautiful. Oh, I remember everything—everything. It's just that—they seem like people in a dream I once dreamed and can't forget. I hate it to be that way. I want to *realize* them, to-day of all days."

Mary turned away, her face full of sadness. Alexandra looked after her, and thought she understood. But it didn't seem the time to tell Mary just what her understanding was. She followed her friend and put her arm about her.

"Five years, at your age, is a long time, Mary," she said. "And I think it may be that the world of the imagination you

live in so much makes the real world a little less real to you than it is to other people. But—you can't get away from such a father and mother as those. They'll come back to you more clearly, very likely, when you are five years older, than they do now."

"I want them to-day."

"Then you shall have them. You may find them—in the church. Have you been there this morning?"

Mary shook her head. "I couldn't. I dread to go there now. I don't know why. I'm not in the mood for church. I'd rather go off in the woods and fields and keep the day that way. But Aunt Sara and the Fenns would think me lacking in respect—and of course I know I ought to want to go. Don't worry—I'll do the proper thing and listen to a sermon that'll have nothing for me. At least, I'll look as if I listened. Doctor Morse, the college church preacher—well, he never interests me. Once in a while President Wing preaches and then I do listen—because I can't get away from him. But there isn't much chance he'll be there to-day—he seldom is."

They were on their way, presently. So was everyone else in the town, it seemed. So perfect a September day had brought out large numbers. The college was about to open, the town was full of new students.

"I think we'd best hurry a little," said Miss Graham, anxiously. "My pew is usually kept clear until the hour, then it is filled. To-day there'll be a large congregation."

As they went into the church Alexandra felt a deep thrill of pleasure. Not in a long time had she been in a church in which the atmosphere of an earlier day had been so well preserved. The exterior had already challenged her respect, but the interior roused her admiration. As she took her place in the well-cushioned square family pew and the usher closed the door behind her, she realized that she was in one of those distinguished old sanctuaries of which there are left, in these

days, all too few. Nobody had forewarned her. Perhaps Mary herself didn't quite appreciate the place in which the memories of her girlhood were enshrined; very likely it was to her now only a mausoleum.

As they waited, the church rapidly filling, Alexandra's eye was caught by a mass of white, just beyond and above the pew in which she sat. She turned her head to read the large silver tablet, below which sprang upward hundreds of white anemones in a huge jar.

IN MEMORY OF
ARTHUR RAND FLETCHER
AND
ELEANOR GRAHAM FLETCHER, HIS WIFE
DIED, IN ITALY, SEPTEMBER FOURTEENTH, 1914

As she finished scanning again and again the few lines, the sound of distant voices broke upon the stillness, and a processional slowly came into view. Somehow Alexandra hadn't been prepared for such music as now fell upon her ear. It was the college choir of young men which brought to her the strains of "*O come, all ye faithful,*" and she recognized that the voices were as well trained and effective as those of any choir of her recollection. In their white cottas they made a dignified company, and as they took their places she saw that Mark Fenn was among them; she didn't quite know why she should have been so surprised.

A strong figure now came into the pulpit; a rugged, interesting face looked out upon the congregation. In Alexandra's ear Miss Graham whispered discreetly: "We are to have President Wing to preach to-day. We didn't expect it. I am *so* glad!"

Beside her Mary stirred, clasping her hands tightly in her lap. Alexandra felt her relief. It would help matters,

surely, if this man with the face of one who brings a message were to be the preacher of the day.

When his time came he spoke, as simply and directly as was his wont at all times. Wing of Newcomb was one of those men who, though of the smaller and less known colleges, yet makes his impress upon the thought of his generation, by both the spoken and the written word. It was as Mary had said: when he spoke one had to listen. And to-day, as he was apt to do, he challenged attention with the first word which fell from his lips:

"Five years ago to-day their Maker took back to himself a man and a woman whom those of us who knew them can never forget. In memory of them, I have chosen my text: '*Ye are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read of all men—written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart.*'"

Her father and mother like people in a dream? How could they continue to be that, with a man speaking of them in words so vivid and so true that they brought back the living image, almost as if it had been thrown upon a screen? The worthy headmaster of a great and powerful boy's private school is sure to be a man of remarkable personality, but few there be who can so describe such personality as to make it live again. Wing of Newcomb did that day that difficult thing, and the most exacting of his listeners, the daughter of the man of whom he spoke, paid tribute in her heart to the memory and to him who made that memory real. As she listened the deep feeling she had longed for came back; she heard her father's voice, saw her mother's face; it *was* true—they had lived, and she was their child! Her heart softened, glowed; tears slowly gathered in her eyes; she sat with head bent, drinking in the words. She was glad to be sorrowful—it was wholesome, sane, that she should acknowledge with every fibre influences so potent, from which she had slipped

away. How far, she didn't know—but she knew now that she had slipped away. It was good, for this hour at least, to come back. She was grateful in her deepest being to one who had brought her back.

"Written not with ink—not on tables of stone—but on the tables of the heart. So their lives were written. It is the only writing which endures. Mere worldly fame is cold beside the glowing warmth of the memory which lives in the hearts of men, the life of splendid influence which persists, not only in another world, but in this. So persists in this world they have left, the life of Arthur Rand Fletcher and that of Eleanor Fletcher, his wife. In honouring their memory this day we still more truly honour all high living, all selfless service, all truth and courage, all noble manhood and womanhood, born of the love of God."

Mary did not lift her head as these last ringing words fell upon her listening ears. Following them, subdued opening notes from the organ preluded those of a voice beginning to sing alone. It was a strong baritone, carefully controlled, and the long familiar words came with an enunciation so clear that every word seemed to fall with peculiar emphasis upon the hushed and waiting air. The musical setting for the great old hymn was the modern and worthy one of Sir John Stainer—his *Lux Prima.*

> Come, my soul, thou must be waking;
> Now is breaking
> O'er the earth another day;
> Come to Him who made this splendour;
> See thou render
> All thy feeble powers can pay.

Sensitive in every nerve to emotional appeal, Mary felt something within her stir and struggle for expression. She did not lift her head, but she could have flung out her arms

toward both speaker and singer, to cry aloud to them her gratitude. The hymn went on:

> Pray that He may prosper ever
> Each endeavour,
> When thy aim is good and true,
> But that He may ever thwart thee
> And convert thee,
> When thou evil would'st pursue.

Now Mary looked up. She must see the man who was sending her a message of such import—a message which following upon those awakened memories touched her very soul. It was to her astonishment that she saw whose were the lips that were singing the searching words as if they came from his own sturdy heart. She hadn't known that Mark Fenn could sing like that. Only now and then throughout the months that she had been in Newcomb had she gone reluctantly with Miss Graham to the white church on the village green. Her Sundays had been spent like other days; now, suddenly, she was conscious that she had been missing something she might have had. Everywhere she had searched for the stimulus she needed—everywhere but here!

> Only God's free gifts abuse not,
> Light refuse not,
> But His Spirit's voice obey,
> Thou with Him shalt dwell, beholding
> Light enfolding
> All things in unclouded day.

If when the voice ceased Mary could have escaped instantly from the church she would have done so. She looked longingly at a door beside the pulpit; she was strongly tempted to fly for it the moment the service concluded. Instead, she forced back the choke in her throat, compelled the mist before her eyes to clear, held up her head, and did that which

courtesy commanded. She returned gravely the subdued greetings of those nearest; she put her hand into the warm grasp of the college president and thanked him quietly for the words he had spoken; she acknowledged to Harriet Fenn her appreciation of the beauty of that mass of white anemones before the silver tablet.

But when she was free at last, she turned to Alexandra Warren. The church was almost empty; nobody was near.

"I'm going to run away for a while," she said. "Don't be worried if I'm not back for several hours. Tell Aunt Sara I don't want anything kept for me—just a glass of milk, perhaps. You won't mind?"

She lifted eyes in which were a strange mingling of light and shadow—of depression and exaltation. Alexandra had seen that look before when Mary had been stirred to the depths. She understood that her friend was in the grip of a powerful reaction from the emotion of the morning's experience, and that she wanted nobody to go through it with her—at least not at this stage.

"Of course not, Mary dear," Alexandra assured her. She gave Mary's hand a significant pressure, smiled at her, and with a little push upon her shoulder indicated that she was sending her wherever she wanted to go. A moment afterward Mary was through the door and out of sight.

Mark Fenn, his white cotta removed, came up to Alexandra.

"Do you think the service was what she could have wished?" was his first question.

"Oh, it must have been. It was a wonderful service. I can't be too glad I was here. You see, I never knew Doctor and Mrs. Fletcher—I know them now. How did it all come about without Mary's or Miss Graham's knowledge?"

"Some of us who cared arranged it. That's the way things happen, isn't it?"

"It was a beautiful thing to do—and it was what Mary needed. I haven't seen her so deeply touched since I've known her. So touched that she's gone off by herself. I wish——" She paused, considering him.

"What do you wish? Can I help you to it?"

"I wonder if it may be you who can. Professor Fenn——" She paused again, as if she found it difficult to put into words the thing she wanted.

"Yes? Don't be afraid to tell me, if there's anything I can do—for either you or Mary. The day's dedicated to such service."

"If you, before she goes back to-morrow, could somehow—intensify—I don't know how else to put it—the effect of this morning's service upon her mind. . . . You know—as I know—perhaps I know it better than you, having lived with her for three years—how—volatile—how fleeting—the most splendid impression may be upon a brilliant, shifting mind like hers. She is deeply affected to-day; to-morrow she may—I don't say have forgotten—but she may have put away from her every bit of that fervour and be subject to the old unrest. I want—so much—to have her find some *rock* of belief—of purpose—to cling to. I want to see her steadied—to meet the hard demands of life. As yet, she doesn't seem to me—quite fit!"

"You fine friend!" The words were all but involuntary. Mark was not accustomed to let himself go, especially to strangers or to those with whom he had slight acquaintance. But he himself had been deeply moved by the service just past, even by his own effort to sing the words of the old hymn into the hearts of those who listened. Never had he heard one woman speak of another in such language as that in which Alexandra had expressed her anxiety for Mary. It so closely put into form his own solicitude, he felt that he had found an ally.

"You're exactly right," he went on, quickly. "There are great possibilities in her, but she's passing through a crisis, and we who are so deeply interested in her must do our part. If it's possible for me to help her, I'll be only too glad to try again to-day. I'd thought there wasn't much more I could do—just now; but if you think I can . . . You don't know where she's gone?"

"No. But—knowing Mary—I think before many hours she'll come back to this church, when she's sure it's empty. She'll want to see the tablet and the flowers again, before she goes. It will be, I think, the hour when a friend like you can come very close."

"How about a friend like you? You understand her better than I. Perhaps it will be you who can——"

She shook her head. "She will have me all the time, from now on. You have an influence upon her——"

"I've thought I hadn't much."

"But you have—more than you know—perhaps more than she knows. Professor Fenn—I'm going to tell you something that—in a way—is a breach of confidence. But—if you know of it, it may help you to understand her. You sent her a note by special delivery, week before last, in New York?" He nodded. "She showed it to me, since we came here—having preserved it." She smiled slightly, and he caught the significance of the smile. "Mary doesn't preserve letters, as a rule, unless she values them. When I had read it she said, in that careless way of hers she sometimes uses to cover real feeling—'It's rather heartening, isn't it?—in a world one can't trust much, to have a real man tell you he's standing by—even if he is rather a solemn old duck!'"

Both laughed, the phrase was so typical of Mary's swift passes from grave to gay. "I'm not sure whether being called a real man offsets the 'solemn old duck,'" Mark began.

But Alexandra interrupted: "Of course it does—you know

it does. You and she have missed seeing much of each other this week, but I'm sure to-day, of all days, a 'real man' can come nearer her than the most well-intentioned woman. I'm so glad I had the chance to tell you."

So this was how it happened that when, late in the afternoon, Mary Fletcher stole into the still church, coming in as she had left it by the narrow door near the pulpit, she found Mark Fenn standing in front of the tablet which bore her family name. She paused abruptly when she first caught sight of him and waited a minute in the doorway, watching him, as if in doubt whether to go or stay. His back was toward her. His hands were clasped behind him, his attitude was of one who has time at his disposal and who may have been for some time where he is discovered.

"I don't know how you came to be here, but I'm very glad to find you."

He wheeled, surprised honestly by her greeting words, as well as by her silent approach.

"I hoped you'd come," he said, frankly. "I came back here because I thought you might. It's a beautiful place to meet in, isn't it? Our old church has a strong hold on those of us who have grown up in it."

"I suppose it's considered very chaste and correct, in the old-style way. I'm afraid I never thought much about it. To-day, with the flowers and the service—and the music—somehow I appreciated it more than I ever have before."

"Won't you come in and sit down?" He held the door of the Graham pew open for her, and she entered and took a place. She looked up at the mass of white anemones beneath the tablet near by.

"It was wonderfully thoughtful of you and Harriet to put those there."

"Harriet's cherished her anemones each year, to cut them for this purpose. If you like them, that's thanks enough."

She sat in silence for a little, looking about the church, and he was silent also. He thought he saw that she was tired with her long walk—he was sure she had been walking, for her slim shoes were dusty, and her cheeks were flushed with a touch of sunburn.

"I didn't know you could sing—as you did this morning," she said, at length. "Of course I've seen you in the choir the few times I've come to church this year. I've been wishing I could hear you sing that song again. I want to remember it."

"I'll gladly sing it for you—here, if you like. Will you play it? It needs the organ."

They went down the aisle to the organ, set closely to the wall at one side—not a large organ, but of a fair quality. Mark opened it, found the hymn, and turned a switch.

"We're very proud that we no longer have to hire a boy to blow the bellows," he said, with a smile.

"I don't know much about organs, but I presume I can manage a few stops," and Mary took her place upon the bench. She proved that she knew rather more about organs than was to have been expected, for she played the hymn with understanding. Mark sat down upon the bench beside her and sang it through. Somehow the sound of his voice shook her even more than it had done in the morning. With the last words she was trembling from head to foot with nervous tension, and as her hands left the keys she broke into silent sobbing. She slipped from the bench, went hurriedly down the aisle to the old square pew, dropped upon the floor within, burying her face in the cushion.

He came slowly after her, uncertain what she would want of him, but himself more touched by her evident need of comfort than he could have foreseen himself to be. Sometimes—indeed often—he had suspected her of playing a part; but he had no such suspicion now. With all her arts and graces, he was sure that something genuine and admirable

lay below the surface charm of her—she could hardly be the daughter of Arthur and Eleanor Fletcher and not have inherited some of those qualities which had been the foundation of a superstructure so illustrious.

Mark entered the pew and closed the door behind him. The sides of the pew, after the manner of the period in which it was built, were high; within it one felt almost as if one were in a small room. He sat down beside Mary and laid a friendly hand upon her shoulder.

"I know," he said, very gently. "I think perhaps you need to cry it out. You've had a trying day. I just want you to feel I'm here."

It surprised and touched him to have Mary suddenly put up her hand and grasp his. He held the hand close in both his own, while she struggled to be quiet. Presently she spoke unsteadily, in a voice whose inflections still further moved him:

"Please forgive me. It's just that—I needed somebody to hold on to for a little. I'm so unhappy—and so tired. I've walked miles on end—I'm so alone—I—oh, I *wish* you were my brother—and I could behave like this and not seem a silly fool! I don't know what you think of me—and yet—I—can't seem to get hold of myself."

It was very near hysteria—that he recognized; but it had a reasonable basis as not all hysteria has. He bent over her, tightening his grasp of her hand and speaking soothingly.

"You shall hold on to me as long as you want to—and I'll be a brother, gladly. Why shouldn't I?—You've known me all your life. You've had a hard day, and hearing the hymn again was a little too much. We'll just sit here quietly till you're rested and yourself again.—By the way—have you had anything to eat since breakfast?"

She shook her head.

"But that's not right, you know, Mary. No wonder you're exhausted."

"It doesn't matter. I—I *ought* to fast to-day." The words came smotheredly. "Fast—and pray, maybe—for forgetting—my—father and mother!"

She was crying again. He tried to find words to console her. "You haven't forgotten, my dear. Time inevitably dims sorrow, and much has happened in these five years. But you haven't forgotten."

"I haven't remembered—as you have. I know what your father's memory is—you—*live by it!* His principles are yours—I—oh, it's different with me. They—if they see, and know—they're sad to-day. I'm not like them. They burned with a steady light. I'm a—will-o'-the-wisp!"

"You're tired out, and can see nothing clearly. I'm going to take you home—not to your home but mine—and let Harriet feed you. After that, we're going into my study and talk things all over. You go to-morrow and it's my last chance. No, don't refuse. Let me do this for you. Come—please!"

She hadn't known he could impose his will upon her quite so arbitrarily. She wanted to refuse; the impulse to chasten herself, to flagellate her body, as well as her spirit, made her attempt to resist. But when his hand drew her to her feet, she found herself submitting with a sense of relief. It was good, after this weary day, to come back to such a friend.

The early September dusk was falling as he led her up the path to his own door. Harriet was sitting upon the porch—she rose to meet them.

"I ought to go home and wash my face," Mary murmured.

"You can wash it here. I'll run across and tell them what I've done with you. I know I'm being despotic, but I think you need it. We all do, at times."

She let Harriet minister to her needs, bathed her tear-stained face in a plain white bowl in a nun-like small bedroom, and being conducted to Mark's study sat down before a little table spread with a white napkin, upon which were presently

set forth a plate of sandwiches, a glass of milk and some delicate cookies. Mary looked at Harriet Fenn, wondering why she had never realized before just how saint-like a person offering food could appear.

"You're beautifully kind," she said.

"It's been a hard day for you, I know," Harriet responded heartily. "I'm glad to do anything I can."

By Mark's instructions Harriet left her alone while she was eating, and Mary relaxed and rested. She was sitting in Mark's shabby old armchair, and there was even a sense of comfort in that. Only last evening she had been jealously unhappy in this very room; now it was here that she was being looked after with a solicitude which was most welcome. Somehow the recollection of that evening scene made her appreciate the room and its contents and character as she had never done before. As she looked about her, resting her head upon the worn leather back of the chair, she knew that Alexandra was right: the house was the habitation of people of education, of dignity, of character. It didn't matter that the rug under Mark's desk was almost in holes with the shuffling of his feet; it did matter that upon it, resting against a row of books, stood an illuminated card, evidently placed there that the words upon it might often meet the eye. And suddenly Mary recalled that the card had been there for a long time. The quotation—from Lowell—must be a favourite with the worker at that desk. She read it—and read it again.

> The longer on this earth we live
> And weigh the various qualities of men,
> The more we feel the high, stern-featured beauty
> Of plain devotedness to duty;
> Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise,
> But finding amplest recompense
> For life's ungarlanded expense
> In work done squarely, and unwasted days.

"Rested—a little?" asked Mark's voice as he came in.

Mary looked up with a smile—the smile of a woman who is grateful to a man, and is, for the moment at least, frankly willing to acknowledge that he has known better than she what she needed. She was no longer hysterical; it would have been quite impossible for her now to catch at Mark's hand and cling to it. He had brought her back to poise and self-control.

"Yes, thank you—very much rested, and quite sane again. You must be tired of my heroics.—Is this card your motto? No wonder you could sing that hymn this morning with so much feeling!"

"That card was my father's—he was very fond of it. Great words, aren't they? '*High, stern-featured beauty*'—what a phrase and what a suggestion. I don't know of any words which remind me so vividly of my father."

"They fit you, Mark."

"Oh, not a bit! I'm indolent, compared with him. I slack, shirk, forget, let down—and then those lines bring me up with a round turn—as *he* would.—Well—the hours are getting on. Are you going to tell me what I very much want to know?"

"What—do you so much want to know?"

"The sort of book you're going to write—at the dictation of John Kirkwood!"

"Why should you think I'm going to write a book at anybody's dictation?"

"I put two and two together. They make four—inevitably. I wish I could make five out of them, but I can't."

Her eyes fell from his. She wanted to retort with her old fire, resenting all suggestion of disapproval or interference, but somehow she couldn't. She didn't want to quarrel with him to-day, she wanted his companionship, his interest, even —yes, suddenly she felt that she wanted his advice. She was

not to be with him again for a long time and she was sorry. Perhaps she was seeing him with new eyes, since Alexandra Warren had found so much in him. In any case, since she had come back for this concluding week of her stay in Newcomb, she had realized that she was far from knowing all that he was, or all that he might have for her. Unquestionably, blessings do brighten as they take their flight!

She was silent for a full minute. Then she said, with a long-drawn breath. "Do you care to listen to an outline of the book I'm going to write?"

"I should like it, above all things."

She began slowly, as John Kirkwood had begun, to sketch the background for the story. She found herself recalling phrases of his, and consciously imitating his style of speaking. Remembering how he had by degrees worked up her interest by all clever means, the pitch of his voice, the sudden unexpected emphasis of a word, she followed his methods, as nearly as she could. It was difficult at first—she felt that she wasn't doing it well. Little by little, as she went on, she found her own powers of verbal recital growing with use. True to her temperament, the very effort warmed her, excited her, and brought about the state of absorption in her task necessary with her to produce effect. Mary could do nothing in cold blood!

If Kirkwood could have heard her, he would have had high hopes for the success of his plans. If he himself, in putting them before her, had felt it necessary to use all the skill of which he was master, she was still more conscious of the need she had to captivate and convince. In dealing with Mary Fletcher, Kirkwood had had plastic material to work upon; in the case of Mark Fenn, Mary knew that if she brought him to agree with her that she had found a task worth doing, it would be because she should show him clearly that this was so—she couldn't possibly fool him with the glitter and glam-

our of it. Therefore she exerted herself to be clear and logical, to make the most of what she felt were the really fine values of the projected story, and above all to show him that though she might have to deal protractedly with phases of life which were in themselves evil, she should do it in such a manner as to leave them lustreless.

As she neared the culmination of the story she inevitably became herself an actor in it, as Kirkwood himself had done. She could no longer sit quietly in her chair; she got up and moved about, now walking up and down, now halting before her listener. Mark himself, too absorbed to remember his manners, sat back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes following every motion and gesture. She had become a creature to disturb a man's balance and confound his judgment. She stood upon the hearth-rug before the old fireplace, a figure of beauty and grace, her eyes lighted with strange fires, her gestures expressive of every shade of meaning, her voice full of delicate inflections, humorous, pathetic, pleading—never had Mark Fenn listened to such a tale told in such a way. Then she ended, laughing a little, somewhat shakily, and saying—"So that was how it all happened. Shouldn't it be told, if I can tell it—with the very utmost skill I have?" He was for the moment quite speechless with admiration of her achievement, as any but a man of stone must be.

She sank into the old leather chair and laid her head back, turning it away from Mark, waiting silently for his verdict. He remained silent also and motionless for a minute or two, then he got up and began to pace up and down the room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, after the manner of man when he considers a question of import. Then he came to a stand before her.

"You're a marvellous *raconteuse*," he said, as one who offers a tribute which cannot be withheld.

She smiled up at him.

"I shouldn't have said so involved and many-threaded a tale could be told so admirably—that you could have got over to me so much of the dramatic action of it, and not have tangled it up somewhere and tangled me with it. It's all before me—I see just what it is you plan to do. It's one of the most extraordinary plots I ever met with—I'm sure of that. It will make—a very successful book."

"You really think so?"

"I do—of course I do. Nobody could fail to see that."

Then he began to walk again—up and down—up and down. She interposed not a word to hasten whatever further he might have to say. That whatever it was he found it difficult to put it into words became increasingly evident. At last, however, she could bear the delay no longer.

"Oh, don't keep me in suspense!" she said, her colour mounting. "Of course I know you don't like it. I knew you wouldn't. You want to keep me writing—bread and butter!"

Then indeed he was ready to speak. He drew up a chair and sat down in it, leaning forward. His face was grave and intent; the tone in which he spoke was low and reasonable.

"Mary," he began, "whatever we do, let's not quarrel—or misunderstand each other. I can't bear that—and I don't think you can. We should be the best friends in the world; your father and mine were a David and Jonathan, if ever men were. I wish I could do something to make you feel that, whatever I say, I'm doing my best to be honest and fair. I want above all things to be of use to you. Won't you believe that?"

"It must be something pretty bad—to need so much prefacing. Of course I believe all of that, Mark Fenn. Oh, go ahead—tell me how you feel about it. I know already. You don't care for the sort of book that will be—though the telling did interest you, immensely. You couldn't disguise that."

"I didn't try to disguise that. It was absorbing—fascinating. But—tell me just this, Mary. Answer this one question with absolute sincerity, and we'll let all others go. When you've written this book, put into it every ounce of flesh and blood you'll have to put into it, eaten and slept and waked—and lived—with it, for a year or more, and finally brought it to a finish—*what will you have accomplished?*"

She met his eyes without flinching for a moment, while his searched hers to the depths. Then hers fell. "I shall have written a successful novel, I hope," she said, with an effort to speak lightly. "It won't be of the goody-goody sort, of course."

"Shall you dedicate it to—the memory of your father and mother?"

"Don't you think you're rather cruel?" she flashed back at him. "Do you imagine I shall put into it a word that would be unworthy of them?"

"I think that if you kept out every word that could offend, if you did every line of it with the ideal before you of hurting nobody, the thing still wouldn't be worth the doing. Mary! —What are we in this world for? Merely *not* to do harm? Why not—in a world full of pain and trouble and unrest—to try to help!—To inspire!—With such talent—all but genius—as yours—to waste it with performing useless tasks! Why—*why* don't you set yourself to lend all your amazing art, all your powers of gripping and holding interest, to saying something that will challenge the human spirit to its best—*its best* —not urge it to its worst!"

Her eyes were blazing. "Join the ranks of the preachers of sunshine?—the silly philosophy of denying that anything's wrong——"

His exclamation stopped her. "You know I don't mean anything like that. And I'm not denying the use of the book which merely amuses and entertains. The thing I'm trying

to say is this:—When any worker holds in her hands such tools as you hold—shining bright—tools with an edge—it's her responsibility to make something with them besides—graven images of things that can't be worshipped. There's a great multitude of people who worship everything you do. They'll worship this book—because Mary Fletcher wrote it. You'll have had a great big chance to carve the likeness of God's truth in such beauty that they'll want to worship it. And instead—you'll only have set up a human temple to the lesser gods, with the devil lurking in the background. Why, Mary, as you told that story, I could fairly see him grinning out from between the pillars! I don't believe you know—I *can't* believe you know—what it is John Kirkwood wants you to do. . . . That plot is his!"

"Alexandra told you!" Mary had suddenly turned white.

"No. . . . As I told you—I've put two and two together."

She rose. "I don't believe we'd better talk about it any more—if we're to part friends."

He stood looking down at her. "We *must* part friends," he said, in a different tone. "Mary, I've said all I wanted to say. I had to say it. But I don't want you to think of me always as preaching at you. When you're back in the great city you'll have little enough of this sort of thing. The influence will be all the other way. Unless you seek out the preachers you'll hear few sermons.—You'll continue to think of me as an old fogy. But—I'm going to make one prophecy—and when you've heard it—forget it if you can!"

Her eyes met his; he seemed to have obliged her to look up at him. There was a force about him which she hadn't recognized—she was compelled to respect it. She had never seen such a light of conviction in his face—the austerity of it was somehow magnetic; hurt and angry as she was, she had never been so drawn to him.

"Some day, Mary," he said, very quietly, "you'll come back—starved—not only from having tried to live on husks yourself, but sick at heart at having offered them as food to others."

She found no word to say in answer and turned with a little gesture of futility to the door. His own heart was heavy within him, at having dealt this last hard blow to a spirit already exhausted with the rigours of the day. He followed her as she went across the hall to say good-night to Harriet, then out into the warm September darkness. As they crossed the lawn he spoke again and there was anxiety in his low voice.

"Mary, I can't let you go like this. It's perfectly natural that you should be hurt—even offended with me—for my plain speaking. If I didn't care so much about it all, I'd have kept silence. I'm quite a good many years older than you—I wish I weren't. I don't want to seem like a self-righteous grandfather forcing counsel upon you. I'd rather be the brother you made me feel like to-day. Can't I keep that feeling? Won't you trust me? I don't want you not to want me to stand by, the way I told you I should. I want you—*to want me to.*"

He was no longer remonstrant—no longer austere—he was simply and convincingly human. They had come to the white pillars of the Graham porch.

"Friendship," he said haltingly, as she stood with head turned away, "means to me giving nothing less than my best. I've tried to give that to you to-day. If I've only hurt you——"

She turned her face toward him then. "You have hurt me," she said steadily. "Hurt my pride, anyhow, terribly.—But I can stand that—for I think, after all—you've rather warmed my heart, and I needed that, too. You *have* stood by—all day. I want you to keep on, if you will, no matter

how far away I am. I may seem ungrateful—I'm a queer thing and don't always know myself or what I want. But I do know——"

He was silent, waiting.

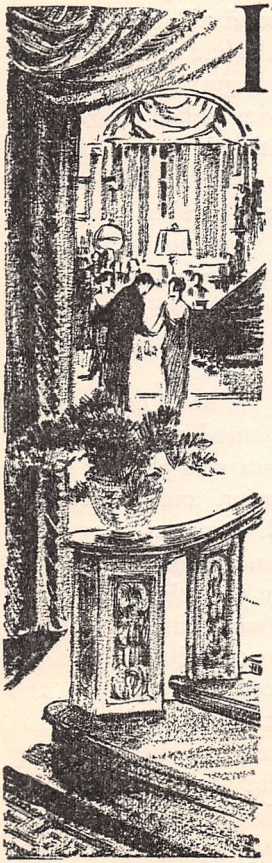
"I do know you're a good friend. I think I'd rather have a friend than a brother.—I—will you write to me now and then? It won't hurt me to hear—how you feel about things."

"I will write, Mary—I want to write. You—let me tell you—you're splendid to take it like this. You'll win—I *know* you'll win. You're your mother's daughter—you can't do anything but the straight, fine thing."

"I wish"—she said, her voice wistful—"oh, I wish I were sure I couldn't. But—you see—I'm not only my mother's daughter—I'm *myself*."

# CHAPTER X

## To Stimulate Imagination



IT WAS not a large apartment—neither was it exactly small as New York apartments go. But its location was excellent, and from its windows could be had a glimpse of the river—just a glimpse, but priceless.

Mary's desk stood beside one of these windows, daylight over the left shoulder; typewriter close by with a hooded electric over it. A small grand piano elbowed the desk at its right, a fine musical machine with a cabinet full of choice records was tucked into the opposite corner.

Books were everywhere, overflowing the bookcases and crowding tables and extra shelves. The neutral tinted walls were hung chastely with a few good pictures—except over Mary's desk, where a riot of framed autographed photographs, small prints, and other pictorial treasures suggested unwillingness to allow the severity of decorative canons to intrude upon this one corner.

Flowers were everywhere about the room. It was a warm-looking room,

its hangings in the siennas and blues, with touches here and there of stronger colour in the lamp-and-sconce shades. Its chairs and its big divan were luxuriously comfortable; a tea-table near the chimneypiece suggested social hours.

Alexandra Warren, returning from her library on a certain late afternoon in November, let herself into the apartment with the caution she always used when she expected to find Mary at work. Within the door she stood still, observing the little scene which nightly now for weeks had met her eye.

Mary sat before her typewriter, her fingers flying. A blue smock like that which painters wear was pulled on over her frock; her dark hair had loosened a little—it looked as if her fingers had been run through it. Her face was flushed. As Alexandra stood back in the shadow, the clicking of the keys ceased abruptly. Mary sprang up, went to the musical machine and started it. She sat down upon a small chair directly in front of it, and as the record began to play she placed her ear close to it and remained, leaning forward, her hands clasped tight in her lap.

One might have thought her deaf! A flood of the most intense and complicated harmonies poured themselves out upon her; apparently a whole orchestra was playing something barbaric in its passion and power, and the various instruments blended in a whole which conveyed a sense of something mighty happening. Here and there came violent crescendoes which made Alexandra, on the other side of the room, wince in sympathy with Mary's ear-drums—but Mary herself seemed only to draw the closer. Three times she played the record over, then silenced the machine and appeared actually to fling herself back at her work.

Alexandra went on into her own room—one of two sleeping rooms opening upon the narrow corridor at the end of which was the living-and-work-room. A fair-sized and extremely attractive dining-room and a snug little kitchen, with a bath-

room which Mary called palatial, completed the scheme of the apartment. She was paying a high price for it—rents had risen enormously since she and Alexandra had leased their first quarters, and these had cost them a third more. Only a writer of independent income, as Mary was from both her own earnings and the family estate, could have afforded to set up a typewriter in such a place, or have kept a maid to save her time while she sat at it.

"Shall I serve dinner, ma'am?"

"Not yet, Norah. Miss Fletcher is still writing. If this is one of your evenings out you may leave it in the heating oven."

"I can wait the half hour, Miss Warren. Miss Fletcher's been writin' the intire day—she'll be wantin' things tasty."

"That's kind of you, Norah. I think Miss Fletcher must be very tired. But I don't like to stop her when she's so hard at work."

"No, ma'am."—Norah was devoted to Mary, who had brought her from Newcomb in the beginning, and to whom she had returned from other service when Mary had come back to the city. "Best not interfere when she's makin' it fly like that. I'll wait till eight—I've a good dinner to-night and want to see it served."

But Norah had set her "tasty" dinner in the heating oven and gone out with a friend long before Mary's typewriter stopped clicking. When it did, and its operator sat back in her chair, throwing up her arms in a long stretch to ease the aching muscles, then bending forward once more to reread the last full page, Alexandra came forward from an armchair where she had been quietly reading and waiting.

"Done?"

Mary lifted her flushed face. "Done—praises be! The fourth chapter. My heart—and I'm done too! I've been crazy over it, all day. It's gone like mad—the first work I've

had go *that* way since we came home. Oh, but it's worth all it costs, when it comes with a rush. That blessed record—it did the trick! I must hear it again—now!"

"My dear, it's almost nine o'clock—dinner's waiting in the oven——"

But Mary was at the machine and had started the record. She played it through.

"Wonderful, Sandy? Oh, but you haven't an idea what it means to me. To you it's merely the ghost of the original performance—to me it brings it all back. And it means—my fourth chapter! I've written it—on that music. I've literally soaked myself in it, all day. And now it's done—and—it's good—I'll swear it is! Oh—but I'm tired to the last inch of me!"

"Come straight out to dinner. You need it badly."

"Need it? I'm starved as any workingman—or ditch digger! Tell Norah to serve it while I wash my face."

Alexandra served the dinner herself, at the round, prettily laid table with its bowl of pink roses in the centre. Mary came in presently, her blue smock removed, her hairpins tightened, her eyes a little bloodshot from the long strain of her day's work. She was sighing with weariness as she took her place.

"Cut it up and put it in my mouth," she begged, languidly. "And don't make me wait till dessert for my coffee. I want a big black cupful of it now."

"Oh, no, my dear girl! You can't have it. You know what it would do to you."

"That's what I want it to do. John Kirkwood's coming over to hear the chapter. He'll be here at ten."

"Not to-night!"

Mary nodded. "To-night. I called him at five o'clock and told him he had to hear it to-night. I can't sleep till I hear him say it's corking. You won't mind sitting up a

little, will you? It won't take more than an hour. He'll go by half past eleven.—And I must have the coffee to brace me for the reading."

"Mary——"

"I know all thou would'st say, lady." Mary smiled impudently across the table, her elbows upon it, her hands supporting her drooping head. "I know thy counsel is wise and prudent, as ever. But—all rules have their exceptions. When I've written a chapter like this one I simply can't live till next day to take my friend the editor off his feet with it. Prithee, bring me the coffee."

She drank it, two big black cups instead of one, and as it took hold of her fatigue and shortly banished it she became a new creature—though her friend was by no means satisfied with the transformation, fearing the means. By the time John Kirkwood's ring was heard, Mary was smooth and fresh in a corn-coloured silken tunic, and only the heavy shadows under her eyes betrayed the strenuousness of the effort just ended.

"The fourth ready? You *are* putting on the pressure," observed Kirkwood, as he settled himself in the big chair always reserved for him. "Sure you're not too tired to read it to me? What if I should read it to you, for a change?"

"Oh, no—you wouldn't get my inflections. Besides, there are places where it's badly mangled—though not as much as usual. You mightn't disentangle them easily—and then I should go perfectly crazy."

"Just the same, I want to try it. The reader of the book won't get your inflections, either. Better see what I can read into it. Come—give me my way."

He had his way. Curled up in a corner of the divan Mary sat watching his face as he turned page after page of her typed script. He was a perfect reader, and as the chapter proceeded the listener felt that it gained by the intelligence

of the interpreter, so that certain phrases fell upon her ear with an emphasis she had hardly known they possessed. He missed nothing, he felt his way through her interlineations with hardly a slackening of the steady pace at which he read, and when he came to the climax of the chapter a satisfied nod and smile gave his verdict before he spoke.

"Good work—excellent work! You're getting into it with a rush, now. That chapter shows you have your scheme well in hand. You've done just what I wanted to see you do in this—advanced the story by leaps and bounds, and still kept a close grip on the interest. It's sometimes rather difficult to do both."

"You're really satisfied with it, then? I thought you weren't, quite, with the first three. So I vowed I'd make you own this was good."

He was still smiling as he got up to stand upon the hearth-rug, looking down upon her.

"You read me, did you? Well, you're right—I can tell you, now that you're really off down the track. The first three chapters showed traces of your effort to get started—a perfectly natural result of the long siege of the dull months in your country town. But they can be made right—all they will need is a bit of compressing and tightening, on your first revision. You got under way a little like a new engine with a heavy load—the power was there but the necessary adjustments of time and experience hadn't taken place. Remember Kipling's '.007'? But you're getting up steam, and when you have a clear track with all signals set you'll make a record run."

Mary frowned up at him—smiling through the frown, however. "I don't know whether I want to be compared to an engine. I don't want to feel a heavy load and have to keep on the track.—I want to be off up in the air somewhere, free, flying."

"Very well—I amend my metaphor. But even in the air you'll have to be subject to the laws of the air—winds, cross currents, pockets, terrific gales. And—I must remind you that airplanes carry engines."

"Airplanes? Yes—but not birds!"

It was his turn to frown. "My dear Mary! It can't be possible you're still romantic enough to want to be a bird rather than a plane? Doesn't the idea of that whirring motor fascinate you beyond the image of any paltry bird sailing on little insufficient wings? For shame! Be a Spad or a De Haviland, if you like, but have a human brain at the controls."

She got up and came over to him. "You really do like the chapter?"

He looked down at her, recognizing instantly the writer's insatiate longing for more praise with which to feed the fires of her energy. In spite of her weariness, he must leave her keen for more work. He plunged instantly into a detailed recognition of the success of the chapter he had just read and the reasons for it; took up its construction, point by point; said, "This was a mighty clever touch"—"That was a bit of consummate art"—"The closing scene was absolute, human realism, convincing to the last word." And so, finally had Mary Fletcher glowing with happiness and confidence—and regarded her with eyes whose comprehending glance veiled a touch of scorn. Nobody knew better than John Kirkwood how to feed those fires. He had, as his daily task, to keep so many of them alight. Real genius, he was saying to himself, had no need of flattery—hardly of recognition. There were no geniuses on his list. He must make the most and the best of talent—great talent—and that Mary Fletcher most assuredly possessed. He could well afford to give her what she wanted.

But Mary, even while she flushed gratifiedly under his

praise, was not entirely unmindful of the fact that she had asked for it and had received full measure from a practised hand. "Thank you," she said, when he had finished. "That's more than enough—and I don't deserve it all, by any means. But I *have* worked hard, and I'm still so doubtful of myself. I hardly dare believe I'm doing the thing as you feel it should be done."

"You are—and, as I've said, getting steadily into the high-pressure atmosphere necessary to the task. The great thing you need now is just a little more life and colour in your own life. Let me supply it. Drop work entirely for a day or two now and then; relax, and go out with me in the evening a little oftener than you've been doing. You need to hear some big music, I fancy—and see some perfect dancing—and a tense play or two. You've been depending on a phonograph to stir your imagination, haven't you?"

He glanced rather contemptuously toward the open musical machine. He knew some of Mary's devices along these lines. She had frankly told him of them, in days past, and laughed at them herself while she declared their potency.

So he had his way, in this as in other things, and the next evening saw the pair on their way to the theatre. The perfect dancing was first on Kirkwood's list, accompanied by music from a famous orchestra. Afterward came a supper—more dancing—and that night Mary crawled into her bed at an hour so late that she couldn't crawl out again next morning until many working hours had gone by. In spite of refusals—which turned into acceptances under pressure—Kirkwood managed during the next fortnight to carry out a programme which supplied much varied, more or less highly seasoned fare; and to have his protégée meet a number of people whom he said she ought to know, for the sake of the realism of the book.

"If you don't mind my saying so, you're a bit of a country

mouse yet," he said to her frankly, one evening, on their way home in the closed car which was always at his service on such occasions. "In spite of your three years here in town, and your experience abroad, and all that, you don't know life and you don't know people—except of certain favourite types. The others you haven't bothered to know—much less to study. I want to remedy that. There's a certain group of people to whom I haven't introduced you because I didn't think you were ready for them. They're quite wonderful people; you'll find them highly stimulating, though you may not exactly like them. But for the sake of *Sylvia* and *Julian* I think you'll have to know them."

It was another fortnight, however, before he brought about this meeting. Whether purposely or not Mary couldn't guess, but it was New Year's Eve when she found herself entering a locality new to her. By this time she was thinking herself familiar with every type of life she could possibly need to observe, for Kirkwood's acquaintance seemed enormous, and his power to give her fresh situations to study without limit. On this evening she discovered that he had been saving one of the most interesting groups of his familiars for the hour when it should make upon her the most arresting impression.

On the way down the editor's talk had been so diverting that Mary hadn't observed just where she was. When their car swung into a small court and came to a standstill before what looked to be a two-storied Italian villa, she stared about her in amazement. They were far down town in the great city, with high buildings circling them round. Yet before them stood a group of charming small residences, their windows and the sidelights of their doors rosy with radiance; wreaths of holly in the windows, plump evergreen trees rising beside the entrances.

"Made over from the old stables of the rich of former

days," explained Kirkwood's voice in her ear. "Haven't you heard of them? Little jewels they are. Architects have outdone themselves to create this Italian atmosphere. If there's one place in the city you ought to live in, it's right here."

Mary's facile imagination had already taken fire. "Oh, I'd give anything to live here!" she cried, under her breath. "I suppose—it's very difficult to manage it."

He nodded. "You have to know your way in."

"And frightfully expensive?"

"That follows, of course. You'll see some delightful furnishings in here. As for the artistic values—they're priceless, to those who understand them."

He lifted the heavy brass knocker; the door was instantly opened and he led her in. Accustomed though she had been all her life to more or less luxury of living, used to being entertained in homes of wealth, and having known the best there was in the world of education and culture, she now found herself in a new atmosphere of sophistication for which former adventures into Bohemia had by no means prepared her. In some of the haunts to which Kirkwood had taken her she had met characters most eccentric; she had learned to estimate no man's genius by the length of his hair or the sombreness of his eyes. She had listened to speech of all sorts, from the harshest of gutturals to the softest of difficult sibilants, from the lips of those fresh from other shores and struggling to conquer the English tongue. She had been interested, intrigued, charmed, and shocked, beyond all previous experience. Through it all Kirkwood had urged her to miss nothing.

"Some of it's great and some beneath contempt," he had warned her. "Take care not to get your values mixed—and most of all not to prejudge. One can't leap at an estimate of these people you've been meeting these last weeks.

You'll find all the signposts you're familiar with changed around—as the boys change them at Hallowe'en. Learn to reserve your judgment as completely as you can. The types aren't simple—as they are in Newcomb—or even as you found them in your army——"

"They weren't always simple there," she objected.

But he went on dogmatically. "They're complex, often beyond analysis. The most interesting of all will baffle you—absorb you—and teach you—as no school or college may."

He murmured something of the same sort again as the door closed behind them and a man and woman came forward together from a room beyond the small hallway where the fresh arrivals were standing. Mary looked at them—and fell instantly captive.

It was really not possible to describe the woman. The man might be more readily characterized—Mary had known his sort before, or thought she had. He was easily a personality. But the woman was more. All the author's favourite phrases failed her—and Mary's vocabulary was no mean one, nor did her powers of freshly restating familiar descriptions of beautiful and delightful feminine characters lie within narrow limits. She was accustomed to find at her command the exact words with which to make vivid the idea she wished to convey, to indicate a portrait with the lines of a sketch, to use high lights and shadows with ease. But with the woman before her she felt her descriptive abilities at a standstill. At last she had come into contact with the indescribable.

It wasn't that Mrs. Halloway was the loveliest woman she had ever seen. She wasn't exactly that. Nor was she palpably a charming woman. Even the word "fascinating" wouldn't fit her—though there was no question of Mary's preoccupation with her from the first moment. She was very

silent, very still; she sat in shadowy corners, she dominated nobody, and nobody seemed especially eager to be near her—though somebody usually was. And yet—it was impossible for Mary to understand it—never in her experience had it been so evident that in a roomful of people one woman was the centre of them all. It was as if the effect of her were a dam over which every particle of water in a rushing river must fall. Those waters might delay the plunge by forming into eddys, into whirlpools, into side currents, but in the end—they must go over! And with the rest—went Mary Fletcher.

It was a strange evening. Only after it was all past did Mary discover that it wasn't an evening at all—it was the greater part of a night. She was unconscious of the passage of hours. For her, time simply stopped. It didn't once occur to her that she ought to think of asking Kirkwood to take her home. One event followed another rapidly—and yet there seemed no effort to arrange events. A brilliant Russian held a breath-arresting argument with a French actor; a young Roumanian took a rare old violin out of its case and played to the accompaniment of an old German choir-meister—it seemed to Mary that since the world began she had never heard such music. An enchanting young girl appeared from behind a great Chinese screen and danced. And then, suddenly, it was Mrs. Halloway once more who was the focusing point for all attention, though she spoke but one sentence out of her corner—spoke it in a voice so richly individual that all must listen.

It wasn't that she really said anything worth recalling, perhaps. This was what bothered Mary when she kept trying to set down in her mind something definite about Mrs. Halloway. Her one actual conclusion was that it couldn't be done. She tried to list her attractions—they wouldn't be listed. The one thing that was outstanding was the fact

that her husband was even more under her spell than anybody else. This point of difference between her and most of the other women Mary had met in the course of Kirkwood's programme of education was notable.

The hours went on. A delicious supper was served, nearly every item of which was new to Mary's palate. She began to feel of all people most provincial; Kirkwood had been absolutely right when he so called her. With the supper came rich and fragrant wines. She tasted them with discretion, afraid to lose for an instant the complete command of herself lest she miss a single reaction. But nobody else seemed to lose command, either; she hadn't dreamed that people could drink as these people did and show no effects beyond an increased cleverness and charm of speech. At midnight a hail to the New and farewell to the Old Year was drunk—the violinist played something sombre like an ancient priest's chant, which suddenly brightened into a burst of wild rejoicing. Then things went on again.

"What about it?" whispered Kirkwood, at a moment when Mary had been left quite by herself. The other guests had not paid her much attention; all the evening she had felt like an onlooker—and hadn't minded. All she could ask was to be permitted to watch the others.

"I'm quite out of my head, I think," Mary whispered back. "This isn't real—it can't be."

"No, it isn't real," he admitted, on a suppressed laugh. "That's why you like it. To-morrow you'll think it didn't happen. Make the most of it while you have it—we're in luck to be here to-night."

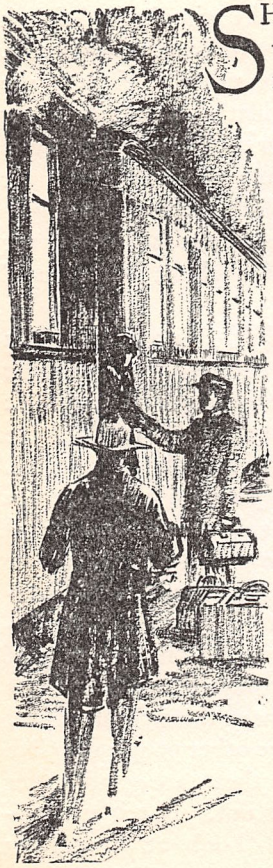
It was at two in the morning that the crisis came—the dramatic climax. Kirkwood had just warned Mary that he thought they'd better go, though the others would probably stay till daylight. She had taken leave of her host and hostess, had assumed her wraps, and she and Kirkwood

were standing in the small hallway talking for a minute with a guest, when the attention of all three was suddenly challenged by a loud, unpleasant laugh in the room within. It was the first ribald sound of the night. They turned to look, saw the young violinist with a shaking hand pointing a pistol at his host, Halloway; the next moment, as the men sprang, a shot rang out. Halloway fell, and instantly all was suppressed confusion.

Mary felt her arm seized, and the next she knew she was being rushed out of the house, across the courtyard, and into the car in which they had come. Kirkwood's voice said sharply: "Get away quickly, Frink; the lady's ill!" and they were off. Mary was trembling in every nerve as the car slid out into the cross street and whirled off toward the avenue.

## CHAPTER XI

### Standing By



"SHOULDN'T we have stayed to try to help?" was her first shaky, worried question.

"Good Lord, no!" was his smothered answer. "Better out of it while we can, since we've nothing to do with it, and there are plenty to look after the thing. The police and the press will be in on it quicker than thought. I wouldn't have you so much as called as a witness for ten thousand dollars."

His hand covered the mouthpiece of the speaking-tube to Frink's seat; the heavy glass partition shut them completely away from the chauffeur, yet his voice was still guarded.

"I'll admit I knew conditions were ragged there, but I didn't dream of anything like this. I wanted you to study Esmé—you'll never have such another chance to find your *Sylvia*. I think when you get over this shock you'll see it was worth it."

"I thought—I didn't think she was *Sylvia* at all. She and her husband seemed—so devoted . . . Oh, poor thing!——"

"My country mouse! Don't tell me you didn't sense the situation. You're really not so blindly innocent as that!"

She glanced at him, a new horror gripping her. "Why—Mrs. Halloway——"

"She's not Mrs. Halloway. Nobody told you she was. Nobody called her that. You simply took it for granted—quite simply, indeed, my dear."

She was realizing all at once that the wine he had drunk had done its work, though his voice and hand were steady. His manner toward her had become subtly different; she didn't like it in the least. She was instantly and intensely displeased with him; her fright over the tragedy she had witnessed was now mingled with rage with Kirkwood for having taken her to a place where such things could happen.

She drew as far away from him as possible, into the corner of the wide seat. "If I had known, I wouldn't have gone," she said, in an icy small voice.

He laughed. "I knew you wouldn't. But I knew you needed to go, to get those beautiful eyes of yours a little wider open to the world. Other things being equal I wouldn't have taken you. As a mere society girl I would have shielded you from such a scene or contact with such people. As a professional writer—well—I tell you you needed to see for yourself what you had merely heard of. You needed to feel the tremendous charm of those whose genius more or less justifies, for them, a mode of life that wouldn't be tolerated elsewhere. Every man and woman you met there to-night is a genius. You didn't hear the actual name of one of them. The Halloways aren't Halloways at all—it's not even their house. It was leased by them through an agent, from the owner, who's in Europe. The other people who live in that court haven't a notion who these are—and never will know, unless this affair brings it out. But it won't—if sheer cleverness will prevent it. Look at to-morrow

morning's papers—there'll be a perfectly straight story about it. Even if Halloway—that isn't his name—dies, those people will all swear it was an accident. You needn't be anxious in the least, since we got away. Stop shaking, Mary dear—and tell me you forgive me. After all, it was just a little glimpse of life. I'm almost glad you saw the shooting, since it gave you a reaction you'd never otherwise have had a chance at. Anyhow, it's not my fault you saw it. But even that was worth it—to get your *Sylvia.* There isn't such an-another woman as Esmé on two continents. And *now*—you can paint her! I could have sketched her for you till the stars grew cold and you wouldn't have got the outside edges of her. Thank me for that, anyhow!"

But Mary would thank him for nothing. A cold fright enveloped her. She tried to remember that as an editor and former newspaper man his attitude was natural enough—for himself, at least; what she didn't like was his forcing it upon her. The character of *Sylvia*—did he intend that she should make of it something for which this Mrs. Halloway—whose name wasn't that—must be the prototype? Then she hadn't fully understood him before. And—even if he had thought it necessary to take her to such a place as that, was it fair—was it even decent—of him to do it without giving her the chance to say whether she would take the obvious risk? Even had no tragedy occurred, he had had no right to take her where her hostess was a woman not fit to be a hostess to any young woman of Mary's world. It was an outrage; she would never forgive him!

His voice went on presently, on a note it was hard to bear.

"You're silent. I'm condemned. Then—dismiss from your mind the notion that you can ever be a great workman. There can be only little make-believe tools in your equipment. Nothing with a fine edge—nothing that can cut—or gouge—

or bore. All you want is a plane—some sandpaper—a bottle of oil—so you can make everything look smooth and polished. No rough edges may show—oh, no—it wouldn't be right not to conceal the ugly holes—if only with putty. Putty! What a useful material it is! My Lord—you've lots of it on hand, haven't you, Mary, my dear!"

She tried to close her ears. She was forgiving him now—on one score. Those delicious wines and liqueurs had been insidious—he really wasn't responsible. The John Kirkwood she knew was a gentleman; he wouldn't have been capable of addressing her like this. All she could do was to let him relieve his mounting resentment by his increasingly plain and cutting speech and to make him no reply. She sat looking steadily out of the window at the flying streets, longing for the moment when she could be rid of him, and be safely back with Alexandra. Alexandra? Could she possibly tell her of this night's adventure? Never! Mary's mind was already made up on this point. Yet how cover her own shaken nerves?—for that they were shaken she knew in every tingling, chilled fibre. Lucky if she didn't go quite to pieces when she got the chance.

He said more—much more—did John Kirkwood, as a man will at a certain stage of intoxication. He was eloquent in his anger—so eloquent that his language would have made welcome copy for one who wanted just that sort of material. He told Mary Fletcher precisely what he thought of a would-be artist who was wrapped round with petty fears, who didn't dare see what the world was like—who thought it was art to paint what wasn't true, what didn't exist, and try to foist it on a sad, bad public who knew better—damned better—and would only laugh and cast it into the discard—where it deserved to be. Only the end of the road brought him to the end of his harangue—where he put the finishing touch on his brutality by telling her that after all she had

never been so near being madly beautiful as she was at this moment, and that he——

The chauffeur opened the door, and the appearance of a white and shaken Mary being helped out of the car with her furs pulled well up over her mouth gave colour to Kirkwood's mention of her illness. She allowed him to take her to the door of the lift, then gave him a frozen good-night. For a dreadful moment she thought he was going to follow her into the car, but with a shrug of his shoulders he turned away.

Alexandra had retired, of course, long since. There was not much sleep for Mary, when at last she tried to sleep. For a long time she hadn't even tried. She had sat huddled on a footstool close by the gas logs of the fireplace, where she had turned the heat up to a high point. Shivering now and then, she had gone over and over in her mind the events of the night, recalling all the most trivial things, while always before her stood out that last poignant scene, like a group shown by a searchlight. Somehow one figure was ever present with her, that of the strange woman who had so challenged her imagination. She remembered the colour of her gown —it had been an odd, flame-blue, of extreme severity of line. Her hair had been black—drawn down oddly and very closely almost to obscure her eyes, which Mary thought were blue, like her gown. Her face had been deadly pale throughout the evening—yet full of life, somehow. She had had an odd mouth—perhaps it was her mouth which——

Oh, what was the use of trying to analyze this creature, with her mysterious hold upon everybody? Kirkwood had said they were all geniuses—those people. She could hardly believe him—were geniuses so plenty, then? As for Kirkwood himself—she did her best not to think of him. The thing that held her, made it impossible for her even to attempt to sleep, was the memory of what Mark Fenn had

said of her projected book.—"You'll only have set up a temple to the lesser gods, with the devil lurking in the background."

It was late in the afternoon of the day which had already well begun when Mary came home, that Alexandra brought in Kirkwood's propitiatory flowers. Mary had told her nothing—had lain in bed all day, pleading a splitting headache after her dissipation. Alexandra had regarded her with troubled eyes, but had asked no questions. She brought her the great box silently, and when Mary waved it away took it out again, arranged the enormous bunch of roses it contained, and put them on the piano. But the box had also held a note, and this she brought back. Reluctantly it was opened.

It's little use trying in this way to express my regret for having let you in for so much that was distasteful. But I want to get word to you somehow that you need fear nothing further as a result of the visit to give you material for your work—as you will see by the afternoon papers. The morning ones didn't get the affair at all.

Personally—I'm asking you to be generous as well as just, and permit me to call for only an hour this evening. It will not be possible for me to have any rest or relief of mind until I see you. I think you know the mood in which I necessarily now am—one of black humiliation for having in any way distressed you. He who was capable of doing that was not, I beg you to believe,

JOHN KIRKWOOD.

She let him come. As a matter of fact, she was anxious to have him come, much as she dreaded meeting him, for she simply couldn't bear to continue to think of him as she had last seen him. In some way he must reassure her—in some way make her believe him, as he himself had said, incapable of really being all that she had been obliged to think him.

When he came, her first sight of him a little softened her heart, which had been hard against him, though she had

meant to keep it hard. He was very grave, looked as if he hadn't slept, was extraordinarily quiet of manner. She didn't offer her hand, and he made no effort to claim that usual greeting. She herself was also grave and quiet. They might have been two people of very slight acquaintance, meeting on a matter of serious import.

Contrary to his custom, Kirkwood did not so much as glance toward the familiar corner where the desk stood. Mary, indeed, had removed from that corner all appearance of work. The typewriter was covered, the desk closed, not a page of manuscript was in sight. Things were so painfully in order that she herself was feeling like a stranger in a strange place. What had happened? She herself hardly knew. But something unquestionably had.

"As I told you in my note," Kirkwood began immediately, "the affair of last evening is absolutely closed, as far as you are concerned. The names of no guests were given to reporters—those of the principals were fictitious. You need never give the whole experience another anxious thought. I hardly need say I would have used every means in my power—and they are many—to prevent the slightest unpleasantness for you. It wasn't necessary. Those people have their own code—it doesn't permit involvement in their troubles for their guests. It is all over for me as well as for you—as if we hadn't been there."

"The man who was shot——" said Mary slowly, and with reluctance, "is he—will he——"

"He died at noon. Those who were present testified that the shooting was accidental; the story given out was simple and straightforward—there was nobody to question it. Nothing could have been more perfectly managed. And nobody will ever call upon you or me to testify to—what we thought we saw. Perhaps we—didn't see it."

Mary shuddered. "Oh, I wish I hadn't!"

"I wish you hadn't!" His voice was full of sadness. "God knows I wish you hadn't. It was too terrible an education—not even I, who am so keen to have you know life as it is, could have wished you to have that memory."

"But—but"—her eyes widened—"if we did see it—and we did, you know—won't we have to——"

He didn't allow her to suffer for an instant under the thought that had flashed through her mind. "The other man took his own life," he said, very gently, "two hours ago. That isn't even in the papers yet. So—you see—as I said—it's all over for you and me, as if we hadn't been there. Only the memory—and for that, I want you to believe that if I could take it from you by burning it into my own brain more deeply, I would. I would, Mary. For I—am desperately unhappy over—what I rather confusedly remember of what I said to you on the way home."

She was silent. She had turned very white—whiter even than she had been when he came in, and that had been a pallor which had shocked him.

"I know it was inexcusable, even by the fact that I wasn't altogether myself. I'd had a double stupefaction, you know—the wine and the tragedy together had spoiled my judgment—put words into my mouth. I was anxious to divert your mind. I thought if we could talk about your work rather than about—what had happened, it would help you to get yourself in hand. I was a poor physician, I know—but—perhaps it was better that you should be angry with me. It took your mind from what was worse for it. But even so—I'm horribly sorry—and ashamed. I can only beg you to believe me."

He let his case rest there. While she waited, considering what to say to him, an old saying of her father's came to her mind: "The only thing one can do with an apology is to accept it." It was true, she knew; certainly if one were con-

vinced of its sincerity, as in this case she could hardly help being convinced. Yet there remained her displeasure with him for having taken her to that place at all, without her consent. He had expressed no regret for that. She couldn't let that go—couldn't take him back on the old ground of confidence in his guidance—not while he wouldn't admit that he had been wrong. She might be very much of a prude; undoubtedly there were plenty of women writers who would have welcomed the introduction to a dubious, brilliant company like that of the previous night, even though their consent wasn't asked beforehand. Somehow Mary Fletcher couldn't feel that Kirkwood was justified, although she couldn't wholly deny that the experience had had a certain value for her.

It was at this point in the interview, while silence was still lying like an open well between the pair, that a telegram was sent up to Mary—the brief message which cut into the situation like a knife, solving for the present, at least, all its difficulties. Alexandra brought it to her and waited while she read it—one arm about her, for Mary's pallor had alarmed her as she caught sight of it on her way into the room.

Mary read the two lines in a flash, and her hand clenched on the yellow paper. She gave it back to Alexandra and sank down into a chair, her head on her arms. Alexandra scanned the message, while Kirkwood came hurriedly to Mary's other side.

Miss Graham suddenly very ill asks for you Doctor Reade advises no delay though case not hopeless keep up courage standing by.
FENN.

As one comes breathlessly to the end of an exciting chapter in a book, and turns the page to find the curtain risen on a scene a thousand miles away, the whole previous situation left in suspension, with no clue given as to how it all came out,

so, between two breaths, one of apprehension, the other of recognition, Mary had exchanged one situation of unhappiness for another. Yet so full of misery had been the hours that had gone before, it was almost with relief that she accepted the necessity for instant action of whatever sort.

It was very evident that John Kirkwood, also, welcomed this chance to do things rather than to think them. He became at once the man of experience and resource, began a series of telephonings to information bureaus and ticket offices, and presently announced that all was satisfactorily arranged. He even expressed the belief that he could secure for Alexandra a short leave of absence from her library that she might accompany Mary upon her journey. But Mary at once forbade such a draft upon friendship.

"I'm no child to be taken care of everywhere," she said, smiling wanly at her friend, as she laid necessaries in a travelling case and looked up gloves and handkerchiefs. "It will do me good to see this through by myself."

Before she left—just two hours after the message had been received—she had a hurried consultation with Alexandra. Both Miss Warren and Kirkwood were to see her off, and the latter had gone down to the station before them to look after a detail of reservations and luggage.

"I don't know what this may mean, Sandy," Mary said, trying to speak composedly as she adjusted her veil. "If Aunt Sara is so very ill, even if she—gets well—it will probably be a matter of a long time before I can leave her. She doesn't recuperate quickly—she's too frail. In any case—I can't make plans. The only thing I know is that I must get back to her and never leave her while she wants me. She's —all I have——"

"Yes, dear—of course you'll stay. And I'll stay here, for a time, until we know. And I'll take care of the manuscript. Hadn't I best put it in a safety vault, at the bank, for even

the—maybe—short time before you can make definite plans? Then if you want it sent on, I'll send it registered."

"You've learned the value of such stuff, haven't you, Sandy?—when one hasn't a copy. Yes, take care of it. If I stay on I'll want it—I suppose—though just now I feel as if I never cared to see it again. All these weeks of work and rush—I don't know whether they've produced anything —or nothing.—What does it matter? Nothing matters—if I can only keep—her."

"I heard of Doctor Reade while I was there. All Newcomb was talking of him that week—do you remember?—because he'd just pulled some prominent person through a frightful crisis. If he says the case isn't hopeless, you may be sure he's doing his best to keep it from being so. Try to rest on that, Mary dear, on the journey. I know it will seem long."

On the way to the station Mary, looking out on the familiar windings of the Drive, said with a sigh:

"I seem fated to meet some crisis in this city. 'The City of Dreadful Night' it surely is to me. It was night when—the cable came from Italy. Night, a year after, when I sailed for France—thinking of them—thankful I could do something hard, to help me forget. It was night—New Year's Eve—when——" She broke off, and went on hastily. "Now it's night again, and I'm off—for——No, I *won't* fear the worst. Only—Sandy—if I'm left alone, I'll—oh, I'll want *you* then, of all people." She bit her lip hard, and her hand clutched Alexandra's tight. "I'm *not* going to cry," she said sternly. "I'll prove I can be strong—as I used to be before I got to putting blood and tears into my work, breaking myself down emotionally. It's such a mistake to cry! It only weakens one, doesn't it?"

On this note she went away. Alexandra really wondered at her, so composed she had become. Alexandra couldn't

know the actual relief it was to her to have something to think about besides what had happened on New Year's Eve.

At the station she avoided being alone for a moment with John Kirkwood, and after one or two efforts at a word with her he gave it up. The only thing he could do to restore the old confidence and understanding was to serve her, as he was doing, with quiet consideration, and trust to time and absence to heal the breach.

Kirkwood saw her upon the train and delayed until she was established in her section—he knew she wouldn't recognize the reason why no other traveller would come along to share the facing sleeper seats with her; he had bought the extra full-fare ticket necessary to this end. Now, at the last moment, he bent over her.

"You won't go away without forgiving me?" his low voice urged. "It's hard enough to stay behind and see you off upon this errand—without that."

She gave him her hand; she could hardly do otherwise. One doesn't willingly part from one who has been a friend without the wish to leave peace behind. He took the hand in both his own, gave it a hard, long pressure which spoke sympathy with her trouble, and as the train began to move ran down the car without looking back. Outside a moment later she saw his lifted hat and permitted herself to wave back at him. After all, the memory of a thousand kindnesses at his hands rose up to bid her act as naturally as she might. When, with the train under headway, the porter brought her a box which held a great bunch of the freshest, purplest violets she had ever seen, her sense of injury and resentment toward him left her, for the time at least, and she buried her face in their cool fragrance. Perhaps if they were kept very carefully in the cold and dark, they might be fit to bring to Aunt Sara, to-morrow night. Oh—if they might only find her able to notice them!

Twenty-four hours upon a rushing train may seem a week. It seemed to Mary, as the last stop before Newcomb found her packed and ready to leave the car, that for a period interminable she had been sitting alone in that section, with her anxious thoughts far ahead of her. At almost every stopping point she had hoped for a telegram of reassurance; it would be altogether like Mark Fenn to relieve her suspense in that way if he could. That she received no message served to increase her fears till they were well nigh unbearable. The early winter dark had long fallen when certain familiar lightmarks began to show themselves along the way —a great power station—a small factory in full blast—a slanting row of arc-lights along a highway leading into the town. There was a certain crossing where trains always came to a standstill; with her face against the pane Mary stared out, her heart beating smotheringly, for from this point she could, in clear weather, knowing where to look, make out the Graham house upon the hill.—Yes, she was sure she saw the lighted windows. Then—but wouldn't the house be bright as usual, in any case? The days had gone by when people drew their blinds and shrouded their lights to show that bereavement was within.

The porter came for her luggage. Mary followed him, sick with terror of what might be awaiting her, yet hoping against hope—against conviction—that in another five minutes she might be drawing long breaths of relief. She hadn't known how she loved little Aunt Sara till she had spent this night and day in the fear of losing her. Mark Fenn would be on the platform, she knew that; as she came out into the vestibule she was conscious that whatever news awaited her she would not have to face it alone. "*Standing by—standing by*"—those were the words that had brought her all her lonely way.

A compact figure, broad-shouldered yet lithe of movement,

ran down the platform. A lean, strong face, the eyes steady though the lips were sober, looked anxiously down at her, a hand grasped hers. Her car was far down the track; the lights were dim here, but somehow Mary knew by the very silence which followed the sound of the voice speaking her name that he had no good news for her.

"Tell me——" she breathed.

"It's all over—dear. Quietly—we think painlessly. . . . Mary—I'm going to help you bear it."

He had drawn her hand through his arm—he was walking slowly, that she might meet the first shock of it down here in the faint light, away from the people on the platform. Somehow, through all her pain and fright—yes, it was fright, at what was facing her, alone in the world with no near kin—she felt that she was leaning upon sturdy strength. By the time they had reached the station itself, and Harriet Fenn had come to her, she was a little steadied.

"This is so good of you, Harriet," she was able to say, and was even surprised at the sound of her own voice.

"I don't know who should try to be good to you if not we, Mary dear," Harriet responded warmly.

She sat between the brother and sister in the car which had been waiting. Through the town—up the hill— yes, the house was lighted quite as usual. Only the windows of Miss Graham's own room were dim—Mary recognized that with a low sob she couldn't wholly keep back, at which Harriet's hand, which was holding hers, tightened its grasp. On her other arm she felt Mark's pressure for a minute as the car turned in. On the way he had quietly, and in few words, given her the outlines of her aunt's brief illness. There had been little suffering, and when she had known that Mary was coming her eyes had brightened and she had rested content. They thought she hadn't known she wouldn't live to see her beloved niece—her sister's child. Altogether, one thing was

certain, Mary wasn't to blame herself—she had done all she could.

"One of the nurses," Harriet had said, in her pleasant, natural way of speaking which fell gratefully upon Mary's ears, "is to stay on with you, for a little. We felt you'd be sure to like her. She's Miss O'Grady, the brightest, kindest soul we think we've ever known. From the moment she came into the house we knew she was a treasure, and Miss Graham turned to her as a child might. She'll be waiting for you, and you'll just let her take charge of you."

"You can't do anything else, with Miss O'Grady," Mark had added. "Dr. Reade couldn't say enough about her. He sent a long way to get her. He knew her first in France; she was a Red Cross nurse in his hospital."

"My first thought was to take you home with me," Harriet went on. "But the second was that, with Miss O'Grady, you'd be more comfortable there, in your own room."

Mary found herself wondering if she wanted any nurse about, no matter how kind. But it had all been arranged; she couldn't say she wouldn't have it. It would be easy enough to send Miss O'Grady away after a day or two. In spite of the Fenns' enthusiasm over her Mary thought she should be quite through with the stranger in a short time.

And then she was out of the car, and up the steps beneath the tall white pillars. The door opened, the light from the hallway fell upon Eliza's solicitous face, a little drawn with weeping. Behind her stood a sturdy figure in crisp white uniform, the upstanding white cap with its narrow black band set upon a mass of the reddest, curliest hair Mary had ever seen. The face below was a pretty Irish face, the eyes blue-gray, the nose a bit up-tilted, the broad mouth friendlily smiling.

"Oh, Miss Mary!" cried Eliza, and her tears fell on Mary's hands.

"Miss Fletcher, this is Miss Rose O'Grady," said Mark

Fenn's voice. "I give you into her care. I can do nothing better for you, I'm sure."

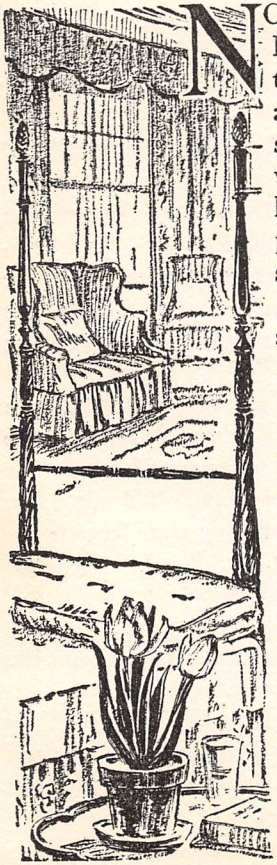
There was a minute or two of uncertainty on Mary's part, while she looked about her, her heart beating heavily at sight of the familiar old hall, with its wide, low-stepped staircase, its family portraits, dark with age, its look of gracious hospitality unchanged with the loss that had come upon the house. Then a warm, strong arm came about her tired shoulders, and the nicest, most comforting voice she thought she had ever heard said gently and yet confidently:

"Just come along with me now, Miss Mary, up to your own room. It's a hot bath you'll be wanting, and a bit of a rest—and then the best cup of broth Eliza ever made—and she's a wonderful cook, as you know. A night's sleep you'll be having before you put your mind to one thing in this house—and to-morrow's another day, and you'll find strength for it. Come—and trust me to see to everything. It's for that I'm here."

Mary looked back at Mark Fenn as she suffered herself to be led away up the stairs. He smiled and nodded, as who would say—"You see? Just let her have her way." She nodded back. All in a moment somehow she knew that Rose O'Grady herself was what she needed—just the Irish nurse who had known what to say to the weariest, saddest, most needy traveller who had come in under the old home roof in many a day.

## CHAPTER XII

### Two Red Tulips



"NO," Dr. Christopher Reade assured Harret and Mark Fenn, "I don't think you need be really alarmed about Miss Fletcher. It may take some time to repair damages, but with Rose O'Grady in command she'll have to obey my orders. Rose has put her to bed—and there'll she'll stay."

"I'm relieved to hear it," Harriet said decidedly, and Mark gravely added a word of assent.

The three were holding a brief counsel in the drawing-room of the Graham house. It was the evening of the day in which Miss Sara Graham had taken her last short journey to the old churchyard where the January snows had already woven for her a heavy white blanket. Mary had kept up bravely through everything from the hour of her arrival; had stood with a white, still face throughout the short service in the snow, and then had come home to collapse completely upon the threshold of that which was now her own and only home. Mark

Fenn, upon whose arm she had leaned in brotherly substitute for that of the kinsman she had not, had carried her up the stairs and laid her upon her own bed, turning an anxious, questioning look upon Rose O'Grady, who had run up before him to lead the way.

"Sure and it's no wonder," the Irish nurse had said softly, as she adjusted pillows and blankets, "and her keeping up by nerve alone. If it wasn't for the pluck of her she'd have let go hours agone. Thank you, Mr. Fenn—and I'll soon have her comfortable. You can be quite easy in your mind."

This, Mark had recognized, had been for the benefit of Mary herself, who had been only momentarily unconscious, and who, though she now lay like a limp white flower upon her bed, had herself murmured, "Thank you—for everything," as he laid her down. Afterward, however, when he had telephoned for Dr. Reade, he had a moment with Miss O'Grady in the hall in which he got a little nearer the facts in the case.

"I don't know what kind of an exhausting life she's been living," she had said, "but whatever it was it's taken the heart and life out of her. I've seen pictures of her in the magazines. She's only the shadow of them. I don't mean bodily alone, Mr. Fenn. There's something gone from her—since they were taken. It'll be for Dr. Reade and Rose O'Grady—and Professor Fenn—maybe—to put it back."

"We'll certainly all do our best," he had agreed.

Downstairs, after Dr. Reade had come down to them, the three had discussed plans for Mary's comfort.

"With that good housekeeper and Miss O'Grady she'll be best off alone," Reade had said, when Harriet had suggested that she herself might look after things. "Let her sink out of sight, for a time—it's what she needs. She's not to see callers or smell cut flowers—or sit up in bed and write let-

ters. I sha'n't be surprised if she gets down to rock bottom, physically and mentally, before she begins to improve."

His prophecy was fulfilled. When she had been lying for two days in the quiet, comfortable room Mary was more weary of mind and body than she had been when she first gave way. When she had lain there for two weeks she could hardly lift her hand to her head, for plain lack of will to do so. One day at the end of the fourth week, however, she found voice to question her nurse, out of a long silence.

"Am I just—going to keep on going down and—down—till I get where I—can't—come up? . . . Not that I—care."

Rose O'Grady got up from the chair by the window where she had been sewing and came over to sit on the foot of Mary's bed. Mary's eyes rested languidly on the fresh, bright face; her ears listened for the answer to her despairing question.

"When you get round to wanting to come up—you'll come. Till then—it doesn't matter. It's driving yourself enough you've been doing. I'm driving now—and when it's time to turn the corner I'll know it. So rest easy."

When Mary had pondered this for awhile she put forth another weak effort. "Did you—or anybody—write Miss Warren?"

"The library lady that lived with you? Sure, Professor Fenn did. And had the answer. She would come if you wanted her. He wrote her you wanted nobody. She's a good friend, I know—and he knows—but there's times when good friends are best at a distance. Coming in to see how you look this morning—and you feeling all green and yallery and not wanting to have 'em see it!"

"Am I—green and—yallery?"

"The saints and all!" Miss O'Grady laughed her delicious Irish laugh. "It's getting better she is—thinking

about her looks. No, Miss Mary—it's not that way you're looking. 'Feeling'—I said—not 'looking.' As for looks—you remind me of a candle that's had the flame put out for a bit, but the wick's there—and we'll light it again, some day. Meanwhile—you're not burning it at the two ends of it—and in the middle."

Mary went off to sleep presently on this. When she woke her eyes fell upon something new on the small stand near the bed.

While she slept Rose O'Grady had flung her red-lined blue nurse's cape about her and had run over through a heavy snowstorm to Mark Fenn's study. It was a Saturday afternoon and she found him hard at work there.

"You told me to let you know when you should send her something to look at. A big box of flowers came this morning—but I put them downstairs. The sense of people that'll send white, smelly flowers to the sick! If you don't do better than that, it's downstairs your gift'll go!"

He had done better than that. He had dropped a bundle of mid-year examination papers where they were, put on ulster and cap, and gone out into a blowy late January blizzard. He had tramped across the town to a small greenhouse, where he had ranged up and down the narrow aisles between rows of carnations and roses to find something to his mind to send Mary.

"Haven't you anything growing except these big, purple things?" he demanded. "No spring-looking stuff, yet?"

"It's two weeks too early for daffies and tulips," the small-town florist explained, with an injured air. "Everybody wants carnations, now. A nice big bunch of pink ones, say? Nothing finer'n them 'Daybreaks.'"

"I don't want cut flowers at all. Something growing. There—what's that?"

Mark leaned past a row of the despised purple ciner-

arias to a corner where a group of tiny pots showed tight-shut green pointed tops just pushing above the surface of the brown earth. "What'll that be, when it's up?" he questioned, reaching a long arm and bringing forth the pot which gave most evidence of coming growth.

"It'll be a couple of red tulips. You don't want *them*, do you? Why, they don't show anything, yet."

"They show they're alive. Put the pot up for me—will you? Wrap it warmly, please—it's bitter cold outside."

The florist, reflecting bitterly that these college professors always were a close-fisted lot, and that this one, buying a thirty-cent pot of nothingness when he might have taken a three-dollar bunch of pink carnations, was "the limit," wrapped a wad of newspaper around the small purchase and handed it over. Unconscious of his scorn, Mark went along out, sheltering his treasure under his arm, the light of conquest in his eye. When, presently, he delivered it to Rose O'Grady, he received high approval of his choice.

"The cleverness of you! I expected you back with something two feet high, with the blossoms ready to fall. This bit thing says—*'I'm wakin' up—how about you?'* It's just the thing. I'll put it where her eyes 'll fall on it when she opens them."

"You really think she'll notice it?"

Rose nodded, her nice Irish grin cheering his heavy heart.

"An hour ago she wanted to know how she was looking. When a woman does that—keep the mirror away from her, if she's been sick, and tell her she looks like a peach. It's the shortest road to recovery I know."

Mark laughed. It was the first time he had felt like laughing for four long weeks. "Trust you to know the shortest road," was his tribute. "When do you suppose I may see her?"

"Whist!" She shook a warning finger at him. "That's

another bag o' tricks. Between casting an eye on your red tulips and laying eyes on yourself—there's a good bit to go. But that's no reason why you can't keep yourself in her mind. Maybe in a week I'll be reading aloud to her. You might find us the book.—And none of your big black volumes full of wisdom. Just a light thing, to make her smile—if you know what I mean—and I doubt if you do."

"Trust me. I'm not such a sober dog as that, Miss O'Grady. I'll find the gayest book in print."

He went back to tell Harriet the good news.

"She asked how she looked," she repeated, dubiously. "Is that supposed to be such a good symptom? Why should she mind how she looks?—Nobody sees her except the doctor and nurse."

"Harriet, it's evident you belong in another class altogether. Your best gown is—your brown silk, isn't it? Mary's is—or was—what was that gauzy, bright-coloured thing she wore at our dinner? She looked like a bird of Paradise in it."

"And I—like an old hen, I suppose. You mean—Mary cares about her looks—and I don't. I hope I don't disgrace you, my dear brother."

He floundered hopelessly in the difficulties he had evoked. "I should say not. You always look—very nice, Harry. I suppose the nurse means—she recognizes in Mary—somebody who likes to be always delightful to look at——"

Harriet walked away. "I'm certainly very glad Miss O'Grady is encouraged about her." And she proved her gladness by immediately looking out fresh tumblers of jelly to send over. Harriet had already nearly bankrupted her own stores of whatever could be imagined tempting to the patient's slight and capricious appetite. That she was both devoted to Mary for her own sake and especially tender toward her now in her loss was evidenced every day.

When Dr. Christopher Reade looked in on his patient, that late afternoon, coming upstairs quietly lest she be sleeping, and observing her from the doorway, he saw her lying on her side, her dark eyes open and fixed upon what looked from a distance to be an empty flower pot. As he stole nearer, however, he discovered the two sturdy little green heads pushing themselves above the brown earth. Across the room Rose O'Grady gave him a signal of triumph.

Mary's face was still very white, the pallor intensified by its framing in the two dark braids which lay on either side. But she had propped up her own head a very little with one hand under her cheek, and there was a suggestion of life in the intent eyes. As the doctor came finally into her view she looked up, smiled a faint little smile, and lifted her hand with two finger-tips pointing upward.

"I wonder if they—find it as hard—to struggle up—as I."

The doctor came close and bent over the pot. A small electric bedside light, shaded from Mary's eyes, focused its rays on the two little green heads.

"They're not struggling at all. Nature's gently pushing them up. When she's ready—she'll push you."

Mary shook her head. "I'm done. I can't—bloom—any more."

He sat down beside her. There was no air of sympathy about him. His face was gaunt with work and care, his eyes sharp; not even his voice was soft. Yet somehow patients never shrank away from him—Rose O'Grady could have testified to that.

"That's nonsense, you know," he said. "Sounds like the kind of thing a story-writer *would* say. Very pathetic—but it doesn't make a hard-headed doctor turn a hair.—How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Horrible!—No wonder you feel on the down-hill side of

life. I'm thirty-nine. It's marvellous that I can still hobble around."

She didn't smile. "I'm talking of blooming."

"So am I." He looked around at the nurse. "Miss O'Grady, what are these two green things going to be, when they declare themselves?"

"Tulips—Doctor. So Mr. Fenn said."

"Fenn sent 'em, did he?" The Doctor glanced quickly back at Mary. "Good therapeutics. Well, Miss Mary, the day the tulips open and show their little black spikes inside, you'll be sitting up in a chair over by the window there. And when the tulips are in bloom in your garden outside you'll be racing up and down the paths picking them—and offering me a bunch when I come by, to remind me of my prophecy."

She couldn't believe him. But somehow with each day that the tulips came pushing up out of the earth—and they came with unbelievable rapidity—Mary found herself a little stronger. In the daytime Rose O'Grady moved her bed over by a window, so that the little pot needn't be defrauded of the light and sun.

"I thought I didn't care whether I got well or not," Mary observed one morning, while Rose was brushing and braiding the thick strands of her hair, "but I admit I don't want to be beaten by two funny little tulips."

"You'll not be beaten. The two weeks that's gone by since they came you've done as well as they. In a week more they'll be blooming—and so will you. What do you say we get you a red gown to wear, to match them?"

Mary laughed—the first spontaneous laugh that had come to her lips. But she instantly sobered. "I'd like a rosy-looking thing to wear," she admitted. "But—why, I'll be wearing mourning, when I get about."

"Oh, faith, no—my dear! You won't be that foolish.

The little aunt wouldn't ask it of you—to keep yourself cast down in the black."

"She wore mourning herself—and so did I—for my father and mother."

"Don't do it now. The little tulip itself wouldn't bloom if we put a black cloth over it. And a creature like you—all made up of feelings—'twould be sheer folly. There's plenty of ways of showing respect to the dead besides burying yourself along with them."

It was impossible not to listen to Rose O'Grady, when in her straightforward way she called anything folly. So since it was much easier to obey her than to combat her, Mary let her counsel prevail. When the day came that she walked, with Rose's arm around her, from the bed to the chair in the big, sunny window, to the rendezvous with the tulips, now unfolding their gay petals, she was clad in a marvellous silken garment of a shade which, though paler than theirs, yet blended with it. With Mary's permission Rose had sent to a distant city for that most Parisian looking *peignoir*, showing a feminine astuteness beyond praise. No woman could wear it without a thrill of pleasure.

"You may say what you like—and laugh at it if you're that dull," Rose O'Grady had said to Harriet Fenn, "but there's something about a pretty thing like that that does more good than medicine. A woman needs to see she's not lost her looks beyond repair. And why not? She'll need them—and she knows it."

"I suppose you're right," Harriet had responded. "I've never had anything so pretty as that, but I can see what you mean. Do you think Mary'll recover her lost ground—or will she always be rather delicate, now?"

"She'll be stronger than ever—if I get my way with her," declared Rose, with confidence. "I'll be teaching her to take care of herself—which she's never done. Oh, 'twill take

time—and she's just a lovely wraith of a creature now—with her nerves that unsteady—compared with mine! But when you see her downstairs, 'tis pleased you'll be."

"It seems a long time not to see her," Harriet said, with a sigh. "I suppose the doctor's right, though, to forbid even us, all this time."

"Right he is. She'd enough of folks, poor girl, to last her a lifetime—even such folks as you and Mr. Fenn. Best forget them—if she could. She'd a hard time doing that, as it was. The day'll come when she'll be crazy to see you—and then you'll be good for her."

The day did come. Two weeks after that first sitting in the window upstairs Dr. Christopher Reade gave Mary his arm and let her walk slowly down to the familiar big, square living-room, across the wide hall from the drawing-room. Rose O'Grady had run down ahead.

"That's right—come in and be here, to make the place seem more homelike," she had whispered, to Harriet and Mark, whom she found waiting in the lower hall, their hands full of gay yellow daffodils. "Take your things off—and sit down by the fire—so you'll look to belong here, as you do. I don't know who has a better right to welcome her down."

So when Mary paused in the doorway, her brows a little drawn in the effort not to give way to the thought that she shouldn't find the familiar, beloved figure at the desk in the corner, her gaze met these two other figures who seemed hardly less to "belong" here. And never, in her life, had two people looked to her so like the best friends she had in the world.

"Oh, you dears!" she said, under her breath, and dropping the doctor's arm, held out both hands to them.

As they came across to her, both were thinking how little she looked as if she had been ill. The long rest, the freedom from rush and strain, the clever nursing, the skillful, scientific

feeding—all had had part in what seemed an amazing recovery. There was a tinge of colour in her cheeks, her eyes were bright and clear. Everything about her was in distinct contrast to the picture of intense fatigue and tension she had presented on her home-coming, almost eight weeks ago. She had even gained in weight, as such patients do. In contrast to the sturdy likeness of health of Rose O'Grady, Mary was as a soft-tinted pastel drawing beside a portrait done in warm oils. Yet even so there was something approaching vividness about her—the darkness of her heavy hair and her eyes, the flash of her white teeth as she smiled at them, the normal rich colouring of her lips.

"Now we know you're real," said Harriet Fenn, holding her close for an instant, then drawing off to look at her. "We began to feel they were deceiving us, and you weren't upstairs after all!"

"I've known you were real," Mark assured her, grasping both her hands, then drawing her with him to the great couch before the fire. "You see, I had such confidence in Dr. Reade and Miss O'Grady, I knew they'd make a new woman of you. And so they have."

"There never was such a doctor—nor such a nurse." Mary smiled up at them as they stood together on the hearth-rug, looking down at her. "It was a case of just having to get well because they said I must. There's no such thing as disobeying either of them."

"Now—now—think of the eggs I've had to dress up in all sorts of pretty clothes, to make you look at them at all, at all. And the Doctor—the times he's altered his treatment, to fit the case!"

"Rose O'Grady—don't tell me the Doctor ever altered his treatment to fit me. He's altered me—to fit the treatment!"

"She's getting well!" Mark declared. "That spark was indubitable evidence of the old fire."

"You started her on the track, Mr. Fenn," Rose O'Grady told him, with her Irish smile. "You and the two bit tulips."

Well, it was delightful to be with them again. After a little, doctor and nurse took themselves away, and Mary was left with her two friends. There was no sadness about the meeting, though the memory of Miss Graham was with them all. Somehow, it seemed to the Fenns, Mary, in spite of all her remaining weakness and frailty, had become already the young mistress of the place.

"I shall stay for a long time, I think," she said—and she seemed to say it contentedly. "Miss O'Grady's going to stay with me, and when I don't need her any more as a nurse she'll take day work for Dr. Reade, but still live with me. Harriet, do you know one of the best things that ever happened to me is the getting to know Rose O'Grady? She's just the sanest, jolliest company in the world—and she's most awfully good for me."

"She must be good for you, if she's brought you to settle down quietly in the old place," said Harriet, with an odd look.

"She has—if only because in that way I can keep her with me. I can't quite explain why I like her so—unless—it's because of her authority over me. My friend Alexandra Warren used to advise me, lecture me, do her best to keep me in order—and I used to slip through her fingers. But Rose O'Grady comes along and tells me to stop mooning and take up my knitting—and—if you'll believe me, I actually take it up. And"—as the others laughed—"that's only partly because she's a nurse. Maybe you don't know how I hate knitting. But I do it—to please Rose."

"I wonder," said Mark Fenn, with a keen glance, "if you ever did much of anything, just because somebody advised it—if you didn't happen to want to do it."

Mary's eyes dropped before his. "I'm afraid not. You have me there."

"Then—since you've reformed, through Miss O'Grady's influence—will you do something to please me?"

"If I can," she promised promptly. "I'd do anything to please anybody, to-day, it's so wonderful to be getting well."

"Then say that the first time you're allowed to go out for a drive, you'll let me take you. If you don't promise me that, I'll see you going off with the Doctor, some day, without any warning. That would be—rather more than I could bear."

Mary looked at him a little curiously.

"Why, of course you may," she said, "though I can't imagine why you should mind if the Doctor happened to come along some day and take me in, out of the goodness of his heart."

"You've had enough of the goodness of his heart. I'd like to show you what mine will do for you. I can't manage a comfortable car, like his; but I can find an easy phaeton and a pretty decent horse. Would that be too great a descent for you? To-morrow's the first of March—we're likely to have some warm and sunny days any time. Come—put your pride in your pocket and say you will."

She agreed readily, though an image of herself and Mark Fenn driving down the village street in some shaky "livery" vehicle behind a decrepit horse produced an inward mirth which she was at some difficulty to conceal. But she had plenty of time in which to adjust herself to the prospect. The first month of spring came in like a lion, with a furious storm, which raged for a week. It took a fortnight for the heavy snowfall of that week to melt slowly away, and the last week of the month had begun when finally the lion turned lamb. Meanwhile Mary had been taken out every day upon the broad rear porch, to pace up and down on Rose's arm, and

by the time the mild weather arrived she was ready in both body and spirit for whatever adventure might beckon.

"The chariot's at the door, Miss Mary—and the charioteer says will you bring an extra wrap? By the look of him he's the one that's taking his first drive!—Best wear the fur coat and the little aunt's fur-lined boots—then it won't matter if he takes you straight on till sunset."

"Furs? Oh, not this lovely, sunny day!"

"This lovely sunny day is a March day, and don't be forgetting it. It's in furs that you go—or you stay—see?"

As usual Mary yielded, though she murmured, "I won't have any will or initiative left, Rosie O'Grady, if I keep you around much longer."

"You may have a good stock of common sense—and that'll do you very well instead. There, go along—and you never looked prettier, if I do say it, that didn't know you before the war. If I had a squirrel coat with a cut like that one, and a little jewel of a hat that looks as if it came straight from France——"

"It did."

"—and a face like that under it—ah, don't look that saucy at me—and had a man like Professor Fenn waiting at the door—with a wheelbarrow—I'd go down and tuck myself in, and be proud and thankful as he wheeled me away."

"You wouldn't mind being in the only vehicle on the street that wasn't motor-driven—and all the small boys gazing at the combination?"

"I'd mind nothing—except that the finest and best man I ever knew—barring one—and he was a priest and took no girl for a ride—was doing me the honour of taking me out."

Mary laughed, and ran downstairs without so much as a hand on the rail. She found Mark waiting at the foot, his face very bright.

"It's good to see you come down like that," he said. "How well you look!"

"Who wouldn't look well—at the idea of going to drive again!"

"How long is it," he asked, as they went to the porch end, where stood the horse and phaeton of the village livery, "since you went to drive behind four iron-shod heels?"

"Not so long that I've forgotten how pleasant it is. And I want you to know that I've three times refused the Doctor, according to my promise."

"You should have a better reward for that than I can give you. Confound him—I suppose you wanted to go?"

"I'd have gone with the grocer's boy, on his delivery wagon, any time this last fortnight!—Oh, how wonderful this air is! Which way do we go?"

"Would you like it better if we avoided going through the town? We can take the road this way. But of course the one I'd like to take is the one out through the hills—and we can't get to that without——"

She turned to smile at him. He had tucked her in warmly.

"Do you really think, Mark Fenn," she demanded gaily, "that I mind driving through the town with you, just because we aren't in a ninety-horse-power Rolls-Royce? Why, Rose O'Grady said I'd be lucky if you took me in a wheelbarrow! Come along to the hills. Of course I want that road. There might be some pussy-willows out that way."

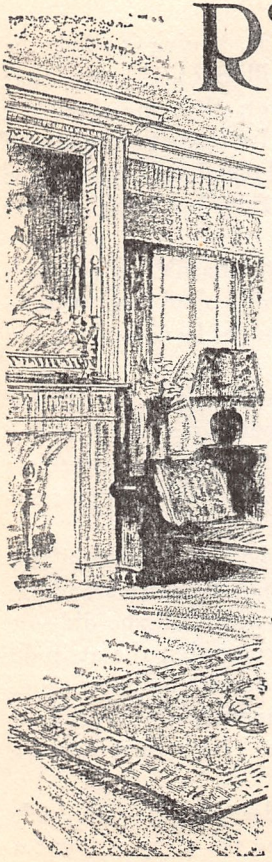
Now, indeed, he was content. If she really didn't mind—and he saw no signs of it as the tall livery horse clip-clopped down the paved street, through the town, and out upon the main road, which being a highway of the state knew not the March mud of the country roads—he needn't mind either. It was a fact that he had never felt quite so keenly the limitations of a professor's salary as when, starting out to engage his equipage, he passed Dr. Reade's slim, trim

roadster standing at a curb. But now, with Mary beside him, and the hills and valleys of the countryside showing ahead, the spring sunshine warm upon the bare trees and rocks, he asked no odds of anybody.

As they had gone through the village square and turned south they had been passed by one of the few village taxicabs bearing a traveller just off the train. But John Kirkwood hadn't noted the occupants of the phaeton, and if he had he could hardly have leaped out and halted them. So it was with anticipation undimmed that the editor was borne up the long hill, in at the white gates, and brought up to the tall pillared porch of the old Graham house. As he got out he glanced across the snowy lawn to see if the small brown house were still next door. Somehow he had never enjoyed the thought of that small brown house. He had never been in Newcomb in the winter before, and he noted with some satisfaction that now, stripped of its vines, its softening shrubbery bare, it looked smaller and shabbier than ever—a poor little house indeed in comparison with the stately residence next door. What, really, he wondered, should the two homes have in common?

## CHAPTER XIII

### Check!



ROSE O'GRADY, coming into the house from a swift walk to and from Dr. Christopher Reade's office, was met in the hall by Eliza.

"There's a gentleman here to see Miss Mary," the housekeeper whispered. "He would wait, though I told him she might be away all afternoon. Maybe you'd better see him. His card's on the table there."

Rose nodded. She noted upon the rack an overcoat and hat of quality, and upon the table beside it a fine leather brief case, a florist's box, a handsome malacca stick, and the calling card. "*Mr. John Kirkwood,*" she read. Without pausing to remove her hat or the red-lined blue cape which signified her profession, she looked in upon the caller composedly seated on the high-backed davenport before the drawing-room fire, a book in his hand. He rose at the sound of her soft step, and even as he stood courteously waiting and before he spoke, she had recognized his type.

"Mr. Kirkwood? I'm Miss

O'Grady, Miss Fletcher's nurse. I hope you're quite comfortable. It may be an hour or two before Miss Fletcher's back."

"Thank you." He regarded her with interest. Most men did, though Rose O'Grady's attitude toward them was of the most business-like.

"She wasn't expecting you, I think?"

"I thought I'd take her by surprise, hoping it might be a pleasant one. I knew she had been ill, but understood that she had recovered. In case, however, that she shouldn't yet feel equal to seeing me I thought I wouldn't force myself upon her with a wire. Won't you tell me about her? Is she really quite well again? I judge so, from her being out for the afternoon."

"She is quite well—but of course she hasn't her strength fully back. I'm afraid, Mr. Kirkwood, I shall have to take charge of her when she comes in. It might be as well for you to call to-morrow."

He smiled. "Very well—if you insist. But I'm hoping you'll relent enough to let me see her for at least a few minutes when she comes in. Surely, if she's having her first drive, as the—housekeeper?—said, she's in the most comfortable motor to be had and won't be over tired?"

"In the most comfortable motor to be had, she would still be tired and would need rest." Rose had remained standing, studying him. He couldn't sit down again till she did—or till she left the room, so the two had somewhat the attitude of challenge as they faced each other across the hearth-rug.

He tried again, in his pleasantest manner, which yet held a touch of authority—to match hers. He was not to be disposed of so easily.

"Miss Fletcher and I are old friends—perhaps you don't know. I can't imagine she would send me away without a glimpse of her to-night. Won't you please not look at me so

sternly? And couldn't I prevail upon you to sit down for a little, and tell me a few things I'm most anxious to know? I knew Miss Graham—I have heard very little of her most untimely passing.—Please?"

Miss O'Grady sat down—but not upon the davenport beside him, as his gesture had invited. She took a straight-backed old Sheraton chair beside the fireplace, removed her hat and laid it on the table, but retained her red-lined cape. She told him, in a few words and restrainedly, of Miss Graham. Mary Fletcher herself, had she seen Rose in the present situation, would have been amazed at the dignity of her. She was showing Mr. John Kirkwood a side Mary had not so much as guessed at. It was the young woman who was accustomed to the entire command of whole hospital staffs whom the editor was now encountering. And when he would have worked the decidedly formal conversation round to Mary herself, he found himself in difficult waters.

"You must have enjoyed intimate contact with so interesting and charming a person, Miss O'Grady. You have met many people in the course of your training and experience. There are none quite like Miss Fletcher."

"The world is full of people, Mr. Kirkwood. It's not myself would say there were no two alike."

"But surely none her equal?"

"I've known her as a nurse. I'm not qualified to speak of her as yourself."

Mr. Kirkwood leaned back. He had walked up several of these blind alleys. He now got up and paced once or twice up and down the room, pausing before various articles of antique furnishing. He glanced with an air of appreciation at several of the old family portraits upon the walls.

"This looks like a Sir Joshua Reynolds," he said, of one dark-eyed lad playing upon the floor.

"It is that. The portraits are all his—or Sargent's."

He turned back to the young woman in the straight-backed chair. "With that hair and those eyes," he was thinking, "I'll be hanged if I won't strike a spark out of you." And he said, taking his seat again: "I seem to recall a—Professor Fenn who lives next door. His sister lives with him, I believe. I wonder if I might have a word with him, if I went over."

"You might try. If he's not in, no doubt you'll find it a pleasant place to wait in."

And now he laughed. "Miss O'Grady! What have you against me? Are you always so cautious about your patients? I'll wager Professor Fenn has Miss Fletcher out with him—the lucky dog! You'll not deny it?"

"They're just coming in, by the sound—so I'll have to deny nothing."

"By the sound!" And, truly, the slow clip-clop, clip-clop of the shod hoofs upon the macadam of the driveway was shouting to his town-bred ears the amazing fact. He stared at Rose O'Grady with incredulous eyes, but an instant later his low laugh turned her angry—a state she had been near all along, but fell into now with reason. For in his delighted mirth Kirkwood couldn't restrain his speech.

"Ye gods, don't tell me he's had her out in a carriage—with a horse. A horse and buggy—that's what they call it! The country college professor! No wonder you thought she'd be tired!"

But he ceased to laugh long before the sound of scraping wheels heralded the arrival of the vehicle at the porch. Miss O'Grady had risen with fire in her Irish eyes such as impertinent orderlies and soldier details had known well in days gone by—not to mention members of the staff who showed themselves less fine of grain than the superintendent judged seemly. Unquestionably he had struck the spark.

"Up here in the small town," she said, "'tis not by the

size of the tires on his car that we judge the man who gives a lady a pleasure. I've never seen Miss Fletcher so happy as when she set foot on the little step of the phaeton Professor Fenn took her in. If you can bring a light like that to the eyes of her—you have my leave to make her the prettiest speech in your power. And being an editor—you should have a fine command of language."

It took but an instant to make his apology—and probably in all his experience John Kirkwood had never made a sincerer one. He made it in rapid, low words which would have disarmed almost any woman as quick and keen at reading the hearts and minds of men as Rose O'Grady. He took a step toward her, and now his face was grave and his tone full of both respect and contrition.

"I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself," he said. "The sound of the horse's hoofs took me back to my boyhood, that was all. I was born in the country, and I remember when it was the height of my ambition to take a girl out in just that way. Please forgive me. I'm only thankful your charge is well enough to take her first drive, after any fashion."

Whether forgiven or not, he had eyes no longer for the Irish nurse. The next instant Mary Fletcher herself stood in the doorway, and John Kirkwood was staring at her as he came forward with unbelieving eyes. It was small wonder, considering the way he had seen her last, and the image he had kept of her, pale, thin, worn—and so desperately unhappy that her eyes for a night and a day after her departure had haunted him.

In the luxurious coat of gray squirrel, with the little hat Rose had been so sure was from Paris on her brown hair, her eyes sparkling with the delight of the long afternoon, just tired enough to be willing to sleep but not yet ready, Mary was a new creature. It had grown almost dark outside—the lights were on in the house, and in the radiance from them

she stood revealed. And the chief thing John Kirkwood noted, in that first glance, was not so much that her face was full of a delicate fresh colour, the cheeks round again as in health, as that the aspect of her was one of happiness and content. Content—and happy—and she had just come from an all afternoon drive with a "country college professor," behind a horse whose hoofs were shod not with rubber but with iron! . . . And at sight of the visitor—the light in her face went out as if a veil had been thrown over it.

The worst of it was, really, that the college professor stood just behind her, in the hall, having brought her in as if he hadn't been with her enough for one day and couldn't leave her at the door. Stood there with as much assurance as if he had just helped her out of an expensive, high-powered motor. He was looking across at Kirkwood himself with an air of—well—it was mighty like proprietorship, the editor thought. At any rate, it struck him as the glance of one who was on the ground at the man who wasn't quite so sure of his status.

Kirkwood didn't get his visit with Mary that evening. The odds were against him, for as luck would have it a third man almost instantly appeared on the scene. Dr. Christopher Reade had happened by, had seen the livery outfit standing at the side of the porch, had decided that his patient had been taken for her first drive—and a long drive it must have been not to have ended before dark—and had dropped in to see how she stood it. He greeted everybody rather curtly, walked over to Mary, scanned her face, felt her pulse, nodded and observed in his most uncompromising tone:

"All very fine—but the place for you now is flat on your back, resting. If these gentlemen will excuse you"—he didn't exactly glower at them, but he might as well, after the manner of a profession privileged to glower—"I'll be pleased to see you going up those stairs."

So Mary went, lingering only to say a few courteous words

in disposal of her latest guest, making an appointment to see him in the morning. When this was done, she glanced at Fenn, and he thought he read the meaning of the glance. At all events he promptly invited Mr. John Kirkwood to come home with him. The three men went out together, the invitation having been as promptly accepted.

"I find myself envying you, Dr. Reade," declared Kirkwood, on the porch outside. "To be able to dispose of a situation as easily as that by merely issuing a command—well—your profession has us all in its hands. I've always thought so and to-night I know it."

The doctor turned upon him. "I should like that to be true, Mr. Kirkwood, for I've a word to say to you. I hope you haven't come to press the claims of your editorial office on Miss Fletcher. I've absolutely forbidden her to think of work for months to come."

"Yes? Nobody could be more unwilling than I to urge Miss Fletcher to work before she's able. But it struck me—doubtless due to your own excellent care and skill—that in all the years I've known her I've never seen her look so well as she does to-night. And, as I understand it, she has found a long drive under—not the easiest conditions—not too tiring. Surely you can't still be anxious about her?"

"I shall be anxious about her," replied the doctor—and now his tone was very nearly gruff—"till harps are no longer treated like bass drums by most of those who play on them. And as that day isn't likely to arrive soon, I take the precaution of putting the harp on the shelf for to-night. When you try to play on it to-morrow morning, Mr. Kirkwood, be sure you don't take it for a drum. Because it isn't one—and never will be."

The doctor got into his car, threw in his gears with a crash, and was off down the street. Mark Fenn led his guest across the sodden lawn toward his own house.

"Pardon me—have you forgotten?—Don't let me interfere with your looking after your horse." The editor's tone was the perfection of civility—the civility born of intense irritation. A fine lot they were, up here in the small college town, taking him in charge as if he were a package that had come by parcels post. Nurse, doctor, and college professor—each had had a part in disposing of him. If he hadn't been so curious as to the personality of Fenn himself he would have betaken himself back to his hotel, to spend the evening as he pleased.

"No—they'll be up after him in a few minutes. This way, Mr. Kirkwood—there's a gap in the hedge just here."

Fenn led him into the small house, and presented him to his sister Harriet—who seemed not at all disturbed by his presence, though he expected her presently to lay strict injunctions upon him concerning Mary Fletcher. Fenn played, with a certain reserve, the friendly host throughout the simple but exceedingly appetizing dinner which was immediately served. Afterward Kirkwood found himself made comfortable in Fenn's shabby armchair, amidst the walls of books which to the editor's eye proclaimed the scholar's library and demanded his respect. Also, he was offered a pouch of excellent tobacco.

"I'm sorry I've no cigars—but I can find you a clean old pipe, if you haven't one in your pocket."

"I have—never am without it." And the guest produced from his overcoat an English briarwood, well coloured.

For a time the conversation ranged over various general subjects, but with the second filling of his pipe Kirkwood broke out abruptly:

"I'm rather curious to know, Professor Fenn, what I'm hoping you'll do me the favour of telling me. From the moment I arrived at the delightful home over there, with its —outward—air of hospitality, I was made to feel that I was

looked upon with—well—it came to feel strangely like suspicion. The housekeeper let me in with hesitation, Miss O'Grady treated me as if at any move of mine she might call the dog, Dr. Reade laid his professional embargo upon me. As for yourself"—he smiled across disarmingly for an instant upon his companion, then resumed his look of intent gravity—"though you have shown me every kindness, I seem to feel it in the air—that you, too, are mounting guard. And yet—I'm an old friend of Miss Fletcher's. I can't help wondering what I've done—or what I'm considered likely to do, that I must be regarded as an interloper instead of a friend. Won't you, as a further kindness, be perfectly frank with me?"

He looked steadily at Mark Fenn, who gave him back his look as steadily. It was a full minute before the latter spoke.

"I would very much rather not discuss it," Fenn said, slowly. "But I suppose that wouldn't be altogether fair to you. So I'll say to you that the truth of the matter is it's impossible for us all not to feel that you were more or less responsible for Miss Fletcher's break-down. She was in what we saw was a very ragged state when she came home—the cause of which seemed to be not only a long period of over-work but also a peculiar condition of over-tension. During the first week of her illness she wasn't altogether herself. I believe the nurse gathered certain facts which led her to assume that her patient had suffered some sort of nervous shock which might have been avoided—and—should have been avoided by one who had her welfare at heart. We have by no means the full explanation, but you can hardly be surprised if we seem—as you suggest—rather on our guard."

Kirkwood laid down his pipe. This situation was more serious than he had thought. He hadn't imagined it, then—they had learned something of what had happened—they

were really allied against him, these people. He stared across at the quiet, strong face before him, acknowledging reluctantly to himself that the college professor gave an impression of sturdy character and of repressed force with which it wouldn't be easy to deal. Mere urbanity and tact wouldn't do it; Fenn couldn't be moved by diplomacy; he must be convinced. Whatever his relation to Mary, it was quite clear that he would have a bulldog's tenacity in his guarding of her from further injury at anybody's hands. With the nurse and doctor as allies he could, quite conceivably, at least for a disastrously long period, cut off Kirkwood himself from any further satisfactory partnership with her. And the book—so brilliantly begun—mounting cumulatively toward its high-level, half-way mark with such dramatic power—why, it was unthinkable that it shouldn't be completed! Unthinkable that in due course it shouldn't be printed, and that John Kirkwood's name shouldn't appear upon its title page with Mary Fletcher's. Who was this country school-teacher that he should interfere in a triumph so legitimate? And the basis of his opposition, the mere half-delirious imaginings of a nervous girl worn out by a long journey and the bereavement she found awaiting her. The situation was absurd—it must be dealt with summarily.

By an effort Kirkwood kept himself well in hand. He spoke with frankness, and with apparent willingness to have the other man know the facts in the case. He told him the story of the evening on which he had taken Mary to the place where the choicest spirits of the times were wont to gather—told him of the quality and charm of the evening's programme of entertainment—told him of the regrettable accident which had marred what would otherwise have been for Mary Fletcher one of the most valuable and stimulating experiences of her life. Told, in fact, the whole story—and—somehow, told nothing. In other words, the editor

used his professional skill, as he had never used it before, and edited the tale as he went along, so that while it seemed to be the full truth, it was, from start to finish, in effect the cleverest of lies.

While he told it, Mark Fenn's eyes never left his face. Kirkwood, uncomfortable under the steady look, though he by no means outwardly flinched, brought the thing to a climax with his closing statement.

"So you see, don't you, that while it was a most unfortunate ending to an otherwise perfect evening, it absolutely couldn't have been foreseen. I did the only thing possible—got her away on the instant and saved her from any slightest publicity. If there had been any conceivable way in which I could have wiped the whole recollection from her sensitive brain, I would have done anything in my power to find it. Not for any gain to myself, would I—but I don't need to say that. None of you here can possibly be more anxious for her well-being than I. I can say no more. Won't you believe that, on the word of one man to another, and give over looking upon me—as it's quite evident you do—as a strange sort of antagonist rather than her most devoted friend?"

There was silence between them for the space of many slow tickings of the old grandfather's clock which stood in a corner of the study. When Fenn broke it at last, it was to speak in a measured, slow tone which yet seemed to hold elements of fire.

"It's difficult to think that a real friend, who must know that the sight of him would inevitably recall the whole painful experience—not to mention the weeks of overwork which must have preceded it—would risk coming here at all without permission. But"—as Kirkwood would have spoken—"it's still more difficult, Mr. Kirkwood, to understand how you could have ventured to come here with the unfinished manuscript, ready to try to prevail upon her to go on with it."

Kirkwood jumped to his feet, furiously resentful of this thrust. "How do you know I have the manuscript here"—for a moment he gave way to his instant suspicion—"except by looking in my brief-case, sir? You *are* an honourable man, indeed, Professor Fenn!"

"I mean to be. I've not looked in your brief-case, Mr. Kirkwood."

Even as Kirkwood would have accused him of it again, he remembered that the case was locked and the key in his pocket. He sat down once more, trying to regain his self-command, which this cool and quiet adversary had for the moment badly shaken.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Fenn. But you can hardly wonder at my anger, at having you jump at the conclusion that because I have the manuscript with me—as you were clever enough to guess—I had any intention of trying to force Miss Fletcher to work again before she was fit. The manuscript is valuable—there is no copy—Miss Warren was breaking up her apartment—I secured it and brought it to its owner. . . . I am done with explanations, Mr. Fenn. I reserve my right to do any further explaining to Miss Fletcher herself, with whom I have an appointment in the morning."

That ended the interview, naturally. Neither man was precisely satisfied with the outcome of the talk. Fenn was a just man—he would not willingly have done an injury. His instinct and custom were to give an opponent the benefit of any possible doubt. He wasn't entirely pleased with himself for having in a way tricked Kirkwood into the admission that the manuscript was with him. Yet his blood was up; he had felt that he had to deal with an opponent so accomplished in the ways of the world that it would take all his own presumably slower wits to deal with him. For Mary's sake he had meant to put Kirkwood on the defensive; to make him understand that he couldn't treat her as he had

done before—with a determination that seemed ruthless to get all he could out of her over-wrought brain without regard to the consequences. Why, it was more than doubtful whether the interview of the morrow ought to be permitted at all, lest it set back her recovery. But at least Fenn had done what he could to protect her. There are situations where the only way to fight fire is with fire—that he knew. Grimly he closed the door on Mr. John Kirkwood, after a decidedly constrained parting.

But it was Rose O'Grady who cut the knot of the difficulty. When she met a Mary in the morning who hadn't slept—whose newly regained poise was shaken, out of whose face the light of the day before had vanished, leaving more than a suggestion of the haunted look with which she had come home two months ago, Rose took things into her own hands. There was little finesse about Miss O'Grady—the straight-from-the-shoulder method was hers.

She telephoned the doctor. "Miss Fletcher had a bad night again, Doctor; the first in three weeks. I know without being told she's dreading the visit from the one you found here last evening. Have I your authority to forbid it?"

The answer came back like a pistol shot. "Certainly, if you're sure she hadn't better have it out with him and get it over."

"I'm sure she's not fit yet to have anything over. Her hand shakes like a leaf—that was steady as a clock yesterday morn. It's myself that'll see the person—if you say so."

"Go to it!" And Dr. Reade hung up the receiver with the same sense of security at leaving his patient in the capable hands of this jewel of all nurses that he had had many times before.

So when Kirkwood was announced, Rose went down. At sight of her he stiffened. His grave face did not relax into

a smile. He was feeling pretty badly used, and very unhappy about the whole situation besides.

Rose was not ungracious; indeed, she seemed less uncompromising than she had done the night before. It was easy enough to recognize that the editor had completely lost his assurance; she had now rather to win him to her position than to deal sledge-hammer blows upon him. In her experience she had long ago discovered that nothing is gained by antagonism after a point is won; and she was fully aware that Mary herself wanted her to be kind.

"Mr. Kirkwood," she said, with her deep-blue Irish eyes meeting his frankly, " 'tis yourself, I know, that'll not be wanting to do Miss Fletcher a harm by seeing her this morning. You've already done her that by coming to this place. She had no sleep at all—she's half ill, but you don't want to make the matter worse. Am I right?"

"You're certainly right in thinking I don't want to make it worse, Miss O'Grady. I undoubtedly blundered in taking her by surprise. I'm very sorry. But now that I'm here—you surely don't think it necessary to keep me from talking with her at all? If the sight of me, as I understand, has brought back her recollection of—all that went to cause her illness, wouldn't it be better for her to see me again, and let me try to replace that memory with a pleasanter one? If I go away without seeing her—as you ask me to do—won't the thought of me continue to hurt her? While if she saw me—I assure you I should be very gentle with her—I shouldn't talk of her work. We've been good friends for a very long time, Miss O'Grady. Are you sure that you know exactly what is best for her now?"

His manner had changed completely from that of the evening before which had so displeased her. It was full of deference and of regret. Rose O'Grady couldn't have been deceived easily; if his attitude had been insincere, if it had

not been so clear that he was quite as sorry as he professed for having come too soon, she would have known it. But she saw, with those clear blue eyes of hers, that he was genuinely miserable. She wasn't in the least able to forgive him for the part he had played in Mary's life of those weeks before her home-coming, but she somehow knew that he was now consumed with regret and disappointment, and the knowledge softened her dealing with him.

"She minds me, Mr. Kirkwood, of a fiddle my brother used to have. It was easy to tune it right, but it wouldn't stay tuned. The least bit of change in the air—or no change at all—and it would go flat. It was a tender bit thing, too—very old and frail. Cracks would come in it, and had to be mended. He would never trust it in any hands but his own, and he kept it wrapped in silk, at that. He'd another—a strong little brute of a fiddle—that you could knock about. But—he couldn't play the tunes on it that he could on the other."

"Do you think I haven't known," Kirkwood asked, after a moment, "that I was dealing with just such a human instrument? If in any way I haven't fully appreciated the delicacy of it, you may be very sure I recognize that now. I want nothing so much as to—help mend the crack. Cracks aren't fatal, you know, even to such a rare violin as you describe, if they're mended properly.—I'll never willingly be even partly responsible for another, Miss O'Grady. I've suffered too keenly over this."

"It's good to suffer," she said. "We learn no other way. But—Miss Mary's suffered enough—there must be no more."

"No more. But can't you conceive that I, who hurt her, might do more than any one else to help her now? I believe it's good psychology which insists that where there is fear of anything it's best to face it and get over it than to run

away from it. In half an hour—or half of that, I believe—I could take away from Mary—I know her well enough to call her that, you see—the worst of her difficulties. Won't you—please—give me the chance?"

Rose studied him. He stood before her on the hearth-rug, his side to the fireplace, and though his face was turned slightly from her as he looked steadily down into the fire, she could see its expression. It was such an interesting face, when one observed it without prejudice, every feature lending itself to the impression of quality which was most outstanding of any, Rose found herself comprehending better than she had done at the moment the thing Mary had said a few minutes before. When she had consented to Rose's seeing Kirkwood and sending him away, if she really thought that the thing to be done, Mary had nevertheless said mournfully:

"In spite of everything, I feel as if I were losing something that can never be replaced. Perhaps, when you see him, Rose, you'll think that after all I'd better see him too. I'm quite able, really. Maybe it would be better—I don't know."

Rose had answered, firmly: "I'll use my judgment." As she descended the stairs that judgment had been all against the man below. But now, something about him was making its appeal to her. For all her Irish warmth of nature, Rose possessed a cool head, partly by inheritance, partly perhaps because of a strain of sturdy Scotch caution in her blood. Kirkwood was not the sort of man to take her off her feet; personally she would have remained cold to him. But a certain sincerity in him, as he now restrainedly pleaded his cause with her, removed to some extent her prejudice against him. And that last argument, appealing as it did to her understanding of the strange laws governing human nature, sick or well, made her reconsider her edict. One of Rose's strongest qualifications as a nurse, as Dr. Christopher Reade could

have testified, was a peculiar ability to see light in a place where she had declared was nothing but darkness. She could shift and change her ground, even as he did, though the change set at naught her own surest predictions. In other words, she was adaptable to situations as they arose; could yield a point with a flash of humour, though her life had been staked on it—yet could hold out against all odds, if she were sure she was right. Just now—she wasn't sure.

"Would you mind telling me," she said, after a full minute's reflection, "what you would say to her? Remember that I know—how the thought of you and what happened kept her from sleep many the long hour. And kept her from it again last night, when she'd been sleeping like a baby for three weeks now. We can't risk—Mr. Kirkwood, we can't risk tuning up those strings again. They're worn thin—they all but snapped before—and we haven't got the new ones on, not yet. It'll take a long time to get them."

"I know—I can guess. No, Miss O'Grady—I'll not stretch those strings. Rather—I might be able to let them down. What shall I say to her? I hardly know till I see her. But I promise you this—I will feel my way very carefully. And I think, if I can leave her with a sense of our having parted in a pleasant, friendly way, with no tension in our relations—such as there certainly is now—it will be better for her than the remembrance of having sent me away as if she were an invalid who could bear nothing. That's not really good for any one, is it?"

Rose O'Grady answered promptly: "It is not—and it's not myself would do it with one I could trust. I don't know you, Mr. Kirkwood, and I've not had reason to think well of you. But—if I put you on your honour to take care of her, and send her upstairs to me when you've gone happier than she's been since you came under the roof——"

She paused, looking him straight in the eye. No man

could lie to Rose O'Grady—or even try to mislead her; she was the sort who could read him through and through, with an almost uncanny perception. She inspired respect as well as candour, and to himself Kirkwood now acknowledged that he had never faced a woman whom he so wished to convince of his own genuineness.

"I give you my word," he said gravely.

She nodded, and went away upstairs, prompt to act now that she was convinced. After a short interval Mary came down. When he heard her voice upon the stairs he went to the door to meet her and saw to his chagrin that she clung to the rail all the way. It was not the Mary of last night whom he met at the foot. Now that he had eyes to see he saw indeed that it was not for nothing that three people had been guarding her from him.

"It's very silly of me, I know," she said unsteadily, when he had seated her and stood before her without speaking. "But somehow the sight of you brought it all back. I don't mean just—that night—though that was bad enough—but all those weeks before. I—you don't know what it was to me to feel—under your power. I wasn't—myself. It was you—you had control of my mind. Somehow—that was a horror to me, even when I was doing my best work. When I was ill here, at first, it was my nightmare that—I was not myself but you. I thought you controlled me—would always control me. I've only just begun to get a little away from that. But seeing you—again—somehow——" And here she put her hands before her face. "Oh, I'm so ashamed to be—so weak. But—I can't bear it—any more."

She hadn't been looking at him, so she didn't see the expression which came over his face—one of pain—then of alarm. He drew a great smothered breath which he instantly suppressed. Then he took a turn up and down before her, three or four steps each way; drew up a chair and sat

down facing her. He leaned forward, so that he could look intently into her face.

"Mary," he said, "I've something to say to you, and I want you to listen—very closely. I'm not trying to control your mind now, I just want you to give me your full attention—and not—of all things not—to be afraid of me. For I am going to make you—*well!*"

She stared at him, and his heart contracted as he saw the purple shadows in which her eyes were deeply set. He realized that he had seen those eyes so shadowed many times before, but had only thought what lovely eyes they were, and that the shadows became them. Now—he wanted to take that deep, tell-tale colouring away.

"I want you to know—to understand," he went on, very quietly but with all the firmness and conviction he could put into his voice, "that if I did—consciously or unconsciously—control you, in a way—you are absolutely free now of such control. I set you free. I shall never try again to make you do work of mine or in my way. Do you understand me, Mary? I want to take away from you that horror you feel of me—I can't bear that, any better than you can bear the thoughts you have had. So—I set you free. Definitely, finally—*set you free.* Tell me—that relieves you? I will say it as many times as you want me to, till you are sure of it."

She still stared at him. He tried to smile reassuringly at her, but the tensity of her gaze showed no relaxing. "But —the book," she said, under her breath. "Your book. It can't be written—without me. You've told me so, over and over. And yet I think—I'd rather die—than try to finish it. I couldn't finish it—not even under your control."

"Mary"—and now he spoke almost sternly, for he recognized something dangerously near to an obsession—"I want you never to speak—or think—that word again. You were not actually under anything—from me—except the will to

have you do your best. And you are free now from even that will. Forget the book—forget me, too, if you need to do that, for the present, anyhow. Nothing matters in the world except that you get well and strong and that you drop all anxiety about everything. Come—tell me that you will."

"You don't *care* if the book isn't finished? Oh, but you do!"

He looked at her. "Hang the book! Hang it—burn it—bury it—but forget about it! I tell you, my dear girl, I release you from it, absolutely and forever. Why, do you think I'm such a cold-blooded brute that I want my book written with your flesh and blood?"

"You cared very, very much. You said——"

"Never mind what I said. What I'm saying now is what I mean, with every fibre of me. Won't you believe me?—If you don't—I'll bring the manuscript in here and burn it in the fire, before your eyes."

"Oh, don't!" she cried sharply. "I don't want to see it. Is it here? Why——"

"It's not here—in the house. You never shall see it, then, Mary—can't I convince you? What have you thought me, anyway? Why, I've meant to be your friend, all these years. I wouldn't hurt you for my life. Oh, please, my dear—you're making me desperately unhappy and anxious. Give me your hand and tell me what I've said relieves you, and that when I've gone you'll rest in peace. Never in all my life have I been so near wanting to be taken and thrashed, for causing you—all I have caused you. But it's all over. There's only one thing out of the wreck I want to keep, if you'll let me. And that's your friendship."

"You would rather—you wouldn't rather—have that than—the book?"

He laughed, encouraged. "I'd rather have it, a thousand times, than the book. If I may keep it, I'll go away happy.

If I could have my choice this minute between seeing the book finished and selling like hot-cakes—and having your friendship—I'd choose without a moment's hesitation. *Now*—will you believe me?"

She lay back in her chair, a limp thing indeed, in contrast to the radiant creature of the evening before. But her eyes were slowly filling with tears—healthful, sane tears, speaking the relief he had tried so hard to give her. She put out one hand, while with the other she wiped the tears away, smiling through them.

"Oh, it's good to know," she breathed, "that you aren't the—monster—that's haunted me. You are—fine—and merciful—and I think—you've taken away—the——"

"Never mind what it was, if it's only gone. And in its place is rest and confidence. Confidence—that's all you need. We all need it—have to have it. When we lose it, we lose all our power. But you'll get yours back, now, won't you?"

"I think so."

"I *know* so. Now—I'm going. I promised your body-guard with the curly red hair that I'd stay only long enough to put myself right with you. Just one thing, Mary. When the time comes, as I'm going to believe it will, that you care to see me—as a friend, not a slave-driver—will you let me know? You *will* care, some time, won't you? You won't send me away without that?"

She nodded. "Some time. Not till I'm quite well. I thought I was. I know now I'm only—convalescent."

"Poor little girl," he said, unsteadily. "What have I done to you? Can you ever really forgive me?"

"I do now," she said gently, "for the first time. But—I think—wholly."

He took himself away on that—it was much for her to say, he understood.

Upstairs, when he had gone, Mary put her head down on the shoulder of Rose O'Grady, and the firm, kind hand patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"There, now—you've got it over. And I see, by the look of you, that you're feeling the better for having it out—as the Doctor thought."

"Rose," Mary asked, sighing with the tired content which was enveloping her as with a garment, "just what do you think of John Kirkwood, *now?* Would you mind telling me how he looks to you?"

"He looks," said Rose, "like a clever rascal mixed up somehow with a gentleman and a soldier. I'd a man in my ward—a captain of artillery he was—that looked a deal like him. He was a divil of a fellow among men—yet he had the heart of a mother in him for old women and children. You couldn't trust him at all—and you could trust him with anything. One day you'd be crazy mad with him—and the next you'd be ready to kneel at his feet, for the beautiful kindness of him. All I can say of that kind is—be careful. And then—be careful again! And I don't know if you know what I mean."

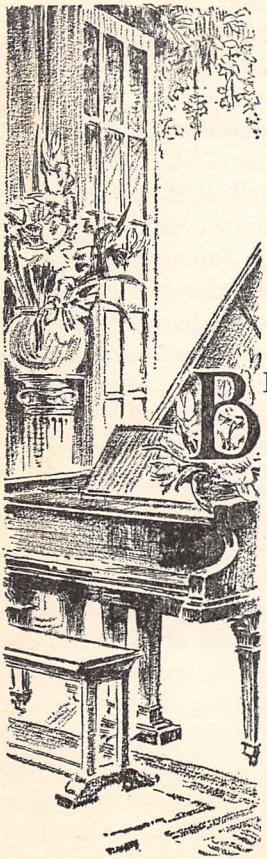
"Anyhow, I know," murmured Mary, "that you're the greatest dear in the world, and it's the luckiest thing that ever happened to me, to be with you."

"There, there—and now she's gone clean out of her head, she has—and I'm going to put her to bed for an hour."

And Rose O'Grady slid her strong young arms about the slim body of her patient, lifted her as if she were a child, and laid her, laughing now, upon her bed.

# CHAPTER XIV

## HANDICAPPED



"In the race, for a place,
In the world of space,
You must keep, with a leap,
All the killing pace.
You mustn't fret,
Nor have regret,
Always try, never cry,
If you lose your bet.
Wear a smile, all the while,
To the very last lap of the winning mile.
That's the play—no other way—
To make life worth the while."

BRAVE words, Guy boy. Did you make that up yourself?"

Rose O'Grady paused in her manipulation of the stiff left arm to look at the pale face of her young patient. He was smiling at her, his lips now softly whistling the lively air to which he had just attempted, in a shaky tenor, to sing the words. His blue eyes fixed themselves upon hers. He ran a long thin hand through his fair, stiffly curling hair, making it stand up oddly above his white brow.

"Sure thing. It isn't any good, though. I don't know how to write

the rhyme stuff. But the air's all right. That's where I'm on my own ground, you know. If I had a piano here—and that darned arm——"

"Yes, I know, Sonny. But the arm's getting better every day. Try and see if you can't move it an inch farther than you could last week."

The experiment was made. Guy lifted pleased eyes.

"You bet I can. Say—when it gets so I can reach that curl over your left ear—will you let me touch it?"

"It's pull it you may—and I'll pull yours. Two curly heads with but a single thought—to pull each other's hair."

Guy laughed. Then his glance fell to the place where the rug over his knees drooped into a hollow, though it should have rounded over a sturdy leg. Rose's eyes followed his.

"By the time your arm's in shape I'm hoping you can have the new leg," she suggested, in the matter of fact tone in which she was accustomed to allude to her patients' disabilities. "Then you can sit down at your piano, put your feet on both pedals, and pound away like the true soldier boy you are."

"Where'll I get the piano? I sold mine to pay the bills. And I didn't make much out of the soldier show, if it did take the town. Didn't have the right contract. I'm down on the bottom—till I can write a new skit. And how I'm going to do that, sitting here in a wheel-chair——"

"Faith, you shall have the piano, if I have to rent one myself. While you're waiting, couldn't you be thinking out the tunes?"

"I'd like to—but it's no good unless you can try 'em out as you go. I'm not the regular sort of composer—can't write my things the way they have to be. I sit at the piano and work 'em out and get 'em on paper so I can remember 'em. Nobody else could read the stuff without me to show what my crazy tracks mean. Just the same"—and the

young face lifted proudly—"I get there. If you'd heard my show over there—— And they brought it back here, and played it to S. R. O. houses—while I was lying in bed in that French hospital. I ought to have been a rich boy if I'd had sense enough not to sell it flat instead of taking royalties."

"Never mind. Next time you'll have the sense. When you get strong enough you'll be writing the best thing you ever did because you'll have the rich thoughts to put into it. And that's what trouble does for us, Sonny."

"Gee! I ought to have a lot of those rich thoughts then, Miss Rose." And the well arm reached out a tightly clenched fist, to hit the arm of the wheel-chair a smacking blow. "Anyhow, you keep a fellow from feeling down and out, and that counts more than rubbing his stiff arm."

"I'm going to have you out this very day. And you shall see a piano, too—a good one. No—I won't tell you how or where. Wait till afternoon and you'll see."

Rose ran home from there. Guy Carter was the last of the morning list of Dr. Reade's patients, to whom she went daily to give massage or baths. The small house where an aged aunt had taken in the mutilated young soldier on his return from the French hospitals stood at the foot of the hill. Rose was so used to mounting the hill at a brisk pace, she arrived at the Graham terraced garden with plenty of breath left to put her case to Mary Fletcher without a moment's delay.

Between rows of double pink and yellow tulips loitered Mary, a basket filled to overflowing with the gay blooms, youth and health in her face. She waved the basket at Rose, coming on apace.

"What-ho, Nursie? Why the mad haste, the sparkle in the eye?"

"Mary, it's your job I've found. And a big little lovely job it is."

Mary whistled. "What if I shouldn't leap at it? I've

thought up one for myself. I'm going into the florist's business. I'm mad over these tulips. I could worship them."

"Mad you may be, but it's my job you'll be taking. It's a human plant you're to have, to set in the sun and tend—and bring to the flower. Listen."

Rose sat down on an overturned bushel-basket, left where Bates had been weeding when he went to his dinner. In brisk but eloquent terms she set forth the claims of the soldier who was longing to write another musical "show," who had only one arm and one leg but a burning brain to do it with, and who——

"Bring him up!" commanded Mary. "I'll fill the house with tulips, set him in the midst of them, and we'll have the first act blocked out before night."

"Whist!—It's not to take him off his feet you are. He's weak yet, and too much happiness won't do for him. You're to leave him alone with the piano, not sit and smile at him."

"Can he sit at the piano?"

"Why not? His wheel-chair can be raised a bit."

"Very well—arrange it to suit yourself. If he's as clever as you think him something may come of it. I'll put off the building of my greenhouse for a week or two. If he wrote '*Present Arms!*' as you say, he must be jolly good at that sort of thing. I saw that on the other side. It was great stuff. Why haven't you told me about him before?"

"The time hadn't come. Besides, I didn't know so much about what he'd done as he told me to-day. He was just a poor doughboy to me, with an arm I'd got to make well."

It didn't take much, in these days, to start Mary's imagination. She had her way about the tulips, arranged splendid masses of them in bowls and baskets, and left a special study in effects upon the right shelf of the grand piano. When Guy Carter arrived in his chair that afternoon, she met him half-way down the garden walk.

"There's one thing you'd best understand before I take you to the big house, Sonny," Rose had said to her patient, on the way up. "You're not to get yourself excited with the company of Miss Mary Fletcher. She's quite a grand lady, in her way—with her fame and her position in the town. She's fairly young yet, but not so young as you, and she's keen for an interest, now when she's forbidden to work at her own. She'll dazzle the eyes of you, for she's that easy to look at; and she'll be kind as an angel, for she'll be sorry for your trouble. But you're not to go losing your head, or I'll regret the day I brought you to her. Maybe you can write your music better for seeing her and talking with her, and that's why I think right to show you a sort of person mayhap you've not just met with before.—You'll forgive me for speaking this plain to you? If one knows at the start one can keep his guard up against trouble, eh?"

Guy Carter had swallowed hard, twice, before he answered: "I guess I understand. You don't need to tell me there's nothing for me anywhere except—work."

"That's not what I'm telling you. There'll be plenty for you, when you're well again. But—Miss Mary—well, she belongs to another world than you and me, and if she's in ours at all we may think ourselves lucky and let it go at that. See—Sonny?"

"I see. Don't worry." The young lips stiffened, the white brow frowned a little. Plenty of practice the soldier had had in meeting crises; in spite of his present disabilities he was no soft thing, to need protection from a girl. He wasn't going to presume upon his luck in being brought to this dignified old house with its tall pillars, whatever he might find inside. If there was a piano inside, and if he might play upon it, even with one hand, that was quite good enough for to-day.

Rose's warning might seem premature, yet as Mary ran out

to meet them one must admit that it was likely to be needed, be it doughboy or general who came thus to her door. The sheer charm of her, now that she was well again, was such as to assert itself before she so much as opened her mouth; and when she did open it the beguilingly mellow beauty of her voice was likely to finish what her looks began.

"How you must have missed your piano," she said, as the wheel-chair rolled into the drawing-room. "And this one's just suffering to be used. Since I brought the tulips in, this morning, it's looked to me as if it just must break out into some kind of a rollicking spring song. I sat down and played Schubert and Schumann on it, but somehow that didn't seem to satisfy it. Maybe you'll know what it wants."

Guy gazed at the big instrument with its mass of single pink and double yellow tulips—the latter so rich in depth of colour that they were almost of a rusty orange. But his eyes didn't linger on the flowers; it was on the long white ivory line of the keyboard that his look fastened so hungrily.

"I might, if I had two arms," he said, almost under his breath.

"My heart, but you can do a lot with one, Sonny!" cried Rose, and wheeled the chair toward the beckoning instrument. Mary pushed the bench aside, and Guy found himself within reach of those black-and-white keys, which had for many months tantalized his dreams, sleeping and waking. Now he sat looking at them, an excited flush slowly rising in his cheek.

"We're going to run away and leave you alone with it," said Mary Fletcher, smiling at him across the tulips—contrary to instructions. But he hardly turned his eyes toward her. Instead he stared down at his stiff left arm. Inch by inch he lifted it till the left hand reached the keyboard; the fingers touched it, moved along it, slowly striking here and there.

"That's it! Give it something it wants to do, and it'll be doing it," Rose encouraged.

Suddenly the right hand broke into a series of arpeggios, tilting lightly up and down the keyboard. Laboriously the left supplied a bass note, here and there. Over the tense young lips crept a smile. Guy looked up. "You've said something," he acknowledged.

Nurse and hostess went away, though both wanted nothing better than to stay and watch developments. Somehow both knew that nothing more satisfying than arpeggios would be likely to come of their presence. Above stairs, however, they listened. It was hardly possible to do otherwise. After a time, Rose, missing Mary, went in search and found her sitting on the top step of the staircase. She looked up, holding up a cautioning hand.

"He's been still for quite a while—I think he's writing it down. I don't dare move, but I'm crazy to see. He's got the *motif* for a song, I know."

The notes broke out again, more ordered than before. By what gymnastics with the well right hand were the lower harmonies being supplied one could only guess, but certain it was that something full and immensely taking was being evolved. It wasn't exactly rag, it distinctly wasn't straight march, on the beat; but whatever it was, it was the sort of thing which gets into one's brain. Some gay young Pierrot might have capered upon the stage in it, turned sober, walked with a stately step for a bar or two, then been off again in a delirium of fantastic movements, only to come back to his dignity once more, with a final grace both captivating and courtly.

In her lap Mary's hands clasped themselves tightly. "Oh, I *must* go down now and tell him how clever—how enormously clever—that is," she whispered.

"Hold him steady, then—don't be praising him too much. He'll be tired now and should stop. I'll take him back soon."

Mary smiled. Well she knew Rose's methods—they were always of the level head. Her own impulse was of course to fly at the young composer and talk composition with him till both their heads should reel. But for such an invalid that wouldn't do, as she of all people ought to understand. So she walked into the drawing-room very quietly, came around to the piano, and laid her hand upon the wheel-chair.

"Nurse says it's time to stop. Did you get something? I thought so—as it came upstairs to me."

He looked at her then, and she saw the change in him. He was no longer the invalid, he was alight with new fires.

"Did it sound like something?" he asked, eagerly.

"Indeed it did. I thought perhaps one of those pink-and-white striped tulips had jumped out on the rack before you, and you were making a dance for him."

He shook his head. "It's for a fellow with a crutch, who's just got back the use of his legs—see? It's been bothering my head ever since Miss Rose came to look after me. The crutch's in the dance, because he likes to wave it about and take a few steps with it, now and then, just to show how he used to go. He's crazy with joy, you see, as anybody would be."

"That explains it. I heard the crutch but didn't know what it was. It's what gives the dance its originality—and charm."

"I'm glad," he said modestly. "Anyhow, it's good to get it out where I can hear it. And on this piano. I never played on this kind before. It makes all the rest sound—like brass."

"It is rather of a wonder-tone, isn't it? I had a man out from the city the other day to tune it, and he made it all over new. You shall come and play on it every day that Miss O'Grady thinks best."

This was the beginning. When she watched him wheeled

down the brick walk she knew that a fresh interest was at hand, but she didn't dream how presently it was to absorb her.

"I might have known," she said to Rose, a week later, "that we couldn't have the boy who wrote '*Present Arms!*' in the house without striking sparks. Why, he's simply a creative genius—in his line. To-day he worked out an idea for a duet between the Poker and the Fire that was the most fascinating thing you ever heard. The Fire gets to burning dully, you see, and then the Poker, cold and hard, and merely doing its duty—stirs it up. The Fire doesn't like the Poker, but it rouses up under the poking. And then, by an accident, the Poker gets left in the fire and grows red hot itself—until somebody comes in and sticks it in a bucket of water. *Sizz-z-z!* I assure you the hiss of that poker takes you off your feet."

"Does he write the words too?"

"That's the trouble. He's not very good at that—pretty ordinary, in fact. To tell the truth—*I* wrote the words!"

Rose looked at Mary. The expression of her raised eyebrows made Mary burst out laughing.

"I don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much. It wasn't the least trouble. It was all in the music."

"I thought words had to be written first."

"Not with Guy. He'd like them first—if he could get them. But when he can't he does the thing into music, and any idiot could feel the words that go with them. I can, anyhow. I think we'll have to go into partnership. We could do a perfectly corking thing together—if——"

She paused, frowning a little. "I think after all I'd rather not explain. I've an idea what I might do. Let me think it out before I talk about it."

It was Mark Fenn with whom, a day or two later, she held a consultation.

"He's wonderful," she said, "but he—well—he hasn't

heard the things he ought to hear to put an edge on his work. Everything he does, clever and even enchanting as it sometimes is, has the same peculiar quality of the music halls—though it's of the very first class of them. He needs, I should say, a course of Schubert and Grieg—and even Beethoven. Of course they're beyond him—and above him—and yet I can't help feeling that he could appreciate them. Anyhow, I think they'd perhaps explain to him something I can't quite—yet—get over to him. Hearing folk-songs would be good for him, too, to give him ideas for his own songs."

Mark was as interested as she had been sure he would be. "There's no great music, at this season, anywhere within reach. Would anything you and I could play for him reach him, do you think?"

"I'd like to try. Suppose you and Harriet come over this evening, if you will; I'll have Guy up, and perhaps Dr. Reade, with Rose, and we'll make a little party of it. I think it will impress him a good bit more if one or two others are there. Then we'll have him play for us, if he will."

"Good! I'll tune up at once. My fingers will be soft for want of practice, but we can probably make certain things go pretty well."

There could be no doubt but that they did. That evening, Rose, keeping watch without seeming to do so, saw that something was happening to her soldier. She had him out of his wheel-chair and established in a corner of the davenport before the music began, where he could see the faces above the keyboard as Mark and Mary played for him. The Doctor couldn't come until late, so they began without him. Every selection they made was for a purpose.

"Grieg and McDowell and St.-Saëns first," Mary had decreed, "and then if he bears all that well, perhaps a Beethoven prelude. What do you expect? That he'll respond to the lighter music and grow bored with the deeper?"

"Hard to tell. I'm inclined to think he'll go where you lead him—or try to, at least, for your sake."

"No, no—not at all. We've been most impersonal through all our talks and try-outs."

Mark had smiled skeptically at this. Impossible, he said to himself, that Guy Carter and Mary Fletcher could succeed for an hour in being impersonal, be they never so absorbed in their efforts at composition. With the best will in the world to give the lad nothing but the association of workman with workman, it wouldn't be possible for Mary to make herself austere or be miserly with her kindness. As a matter of fact the pleasure she couldn't conceal in the work itself was bound to be the greatest of all attractions to the young composer. To add to this the fascination of her own personality was to expose him to a well-nigh irresistible appeal. Only one thing could protect him and hold him steady—and that, of course, would be his ardour for his work.

When Dr. Christopher Reade came in, the evening being well along, he recognized that his soldier patient had been powerfully wrought upon by the music which had apparently just ceased. Mark and Mary were still at the piano, discussing the musical score before them. Rose O'Grady and Harriet Fenn were holding an interested conversation. For the moment Guy sat alone with his gaze fixed upon the two at the piano. His cheeks were very flushed, his eyes looked suffused; the doctor didn't need to feel his pulse—it was all but beating visibly in the artery at his fair temples. Reade sat down beside him.

"Enjoyed it?" he questioned, casually. "Sorry I had to miss it."

Guy tried to speak naturally, but his voice trembled a little in spite of him. "Never heard anything like it. It made the stuff I know sound cheap."

"Where did you get your musical training?"

"Didn't have any, sir. Picked up all I know—around hotels and theatres. Never heard much of any high-brow stuff—didn't think I'd like it."

"Are you sure you don't like it now because you rather like the people who have been playing it?"

The boyish blue eyes met the keen brown ones without evasion.

"Sure—that was part of it," he admitted. "The house always falls for the pretty girl even if she's got only a medium good voice. But—I guess I'd have liked this if I'd waked up in the night all alone and heard it. Some things in it you couldn't get away from."

The doctor nodded. "That's it. I got the last of it as I came up the drive. It was Beethoven, wasn't it?"

"That's what they said. I never knew him—except one thing they used to play now and then in hotels. This was different, though."

"Yes, I don't think they play the big things much in hotels So this seemed really big to you?"

"You bet it did. There was one time I didn't know but I'd go right up through the roof. Then—I looked at my leg —Oh, say,"—the boy broke off to go on again with a rush— "I didn't mean ever to say 'leg' again, Doctor."

"Never mind. The point is you're not thinking 'leg' much, these days, are you?"

The curly, fair head was shaken emphatically. "You bet I'm not. And—if I could write a thing like that Beethoven did, I'd—why, I'd give my other leg."

"Did you know that all the later years of his life he was stone deaf—so he couldn't hear his own music, except in his mind?"

Guy stared at the Doctor. "That a fact? Couldn't hear a note? Why, he must have heard *something*—to write it."

"Not a note. Not the faintest echo of one."

"Gee!" There was a long moment's silence. Then in an awestruck voice Guy murmured: "I guess I *won't* say any more about legs!"

Dr. Reade smiled, and leaving him went over to the piano. "You've made a great impression," he said softly. "But I think it's impression enough for to-night. Suppose you let him down a bit now. I suppose you're giving us something nice to eat or drink, pretty soon. I'm hungry as a bear at this hour always, you know."

Mary sprang up. "Of course. We need a practical person like you to bring us back to earth."

It was next morning, however, that she got the first result of the experiment of the evening before. When Guy was brought in by Rose, Mary took pains to remain out of sight and sound. He was left quite alone and for a long time nothing was to be heard of him. By and by, however, tentative chords and phrases, lightly touched, began to make their way out through the open French windows to the long rear porch where Mary was writing letters upon a leather pad in her lap. Now and again she lifted her head to listen. At length Guy's idea, whatever it was, seemed to be taking definite shape. Mary, to her delight, began to think she could recognize in it a reflection of certain striking and beautiful passages in that great music which she and Mark had played for him. As the work proceeded she put down her pad and pen and surrendered herself to the pleasure of listening without hindrance to the evolution of a new phase in the boy's creative life.

But, finally, silence came again, and lasted so long that she became uneasy. She stole to the open window, and looked cautiously past the long chintz curtains swaying slightly in the warm breeze. To her dismay she saw the fair head down upon one bent arm resting on the piano rack. Several sheets of paper lay scattered on the floor near by. He might

be thinking something out, she reflected. But then, even as she looked, he raised his head, drew his hand across his eyes, and began once more to feel for the notes of which he seemed not to be sure.

Mary decided it was time to give him help. She came in strightforwardly and up the long room, to pause by his side.

"It sounds to me as if you were trying to recall something. Was it anything you heard last night, and can I play it for you?"

He looked up, and she saw that without a doubt he had been crying, though now his eyes were dry. He spoke with an attempt to hide his feeling.

"I'd like to hear anything you'll play for me. I don't know what it is I'm trying to get. I lay awake with it most of the night—I suppose it was something I heard you and Mr. Fenn play."

"I wonder if it might be this. It always haunts me for days after I've heard it again."

Mary gently moved the wheel-chair aside, pulled the bench into place and sat down. When she had finished she turned to Guy, to find him watching her with hungry eyes. His look startled her, though she wasn't sure there was in it more than adoration for her music.

"That's it," he said, his eyes dropping. "I never heard anything like that in my life. It got me. Everything I ever wrote seemed like trash to me beside it."

"What you wrote isn't trash at all. It's very bright and ingenious. One doesn't expect great themes in modern light musical plays. But I thought if you could know some of these wonderful things the masters wrote you'd be so much the richer that perhaps you could put something of it into your work."

"I'd like to," he answered, humbly. "But I guess I could never do anything bigger than I've done."

"I'm not at all sure you couldn't. I thought I heard you playing something that sounded different from anything you'd done before. Could you play it for me now?"

He shook his head. "I don't believe so."

But he was looking wistfully at the keyboard again, and Mary immediately moved him back into place. He felt about for a little, then, with the flushing cheeks which always denoted excitement, played a few bars. His left arm by now was doing his bidding with much less stiffness, and needed but little assistance from the right.

"Oh, but that's very lovely!" she cried softly. "That has a new quality in it. That's not what I played for you just now. Where did you get it?"

"Maybe I've stolen it."

"I don't think so. I never heard it. It must be your own. Oh, please play it again."

He did so, and this time, evidently under the stimulus of her presence and interest, he carried it further than before. She sat listening breathlessly to the evolvement of an idea which seemed to her distinctly beyond and above anything which he had yet conceived. After a time, and with many pauses and workings out of peculiar and rather surprising harmonies, he carried it to completion. Finished, it was but one simple theme, yet it was to Mary a thing quite perfect.

She sat back in her chair and tried to speak quietly. Never, that she could remember, had she been so interested in the work of another or so anxious to be of use.

"Please write that down at once, won't you?" she urged. "Don't let it get away."

"It can't get away. I can never forget it—now. You'd know I couldn't, if you knew.—But, of course, I'll——"

He stopped abruptly, hunting about for the stubby pencil with which he might put upon paper the unskilled musical

hieroglyphics of his own which only he could read, but which would make secure his memory. When this was done Rose had come for him and his hour was over.

But Mary was making fresh plans for him. Searching the newspapers in hope of finding something within reach, she came upon news of a great May festival of music, in a city which was distant less than a hundred miles. With eager eyes she scanned the programmes for each day and evening of the five days devoted to the event. Illustrious names were there—singers, violinists, pianists, soloists of high distinction—and backing all an orchestra of world-wide reputation. It was just the thing—and she would take them all, Guy, Rose, Harriet, Mark—even Dr. Reade, if he would spare the time—for a day at least.

Rose came in upon her while she was telephoning, catching the last of her instructions. It sounded to Rose O'Grady like the ordering of a young queen.

"Yes, your biggest and most comfortable car will do nicely, and I want a chauffeur who can be trusted to come back over those roads at night. We'll start by eight in the morning. Yes, there'll be six of us, I think. Certainly—that price is quite right. And remember—the new car—it's really a beautiful one. Thank you—good-bye."

Mary turned, jumped up, caught Rose by the shoulders and whirled her about—or came as near whirling her as one could with a sturdy figure like Miss O'Grady's.

"We're all going to the May musical festival—for a full day of it. We'll have a delightful trip, in that really stunning new car at the Blackmore garage—you and the Fenns and Guy and I—and *do* you suppose the Doctor will go? I want him so much!"

"And for what is all the extravagance?" Rose inquired, surveying her ex-patient with amazement.

"Oh, Rosie! Don't pretend you don't know! To fill our

soldier full with glorious music, of the best there is in the world."

"Fill him full with music? And isn't he crammed to the eyes, now—the young wonder he is?"

"Yes—but his work is only second or third rate, as yet, for lack of training. Mr. Fenn and I can give him only a shadow of a shade of the real thing. Oh, come—don't look so disapproving, sweet Rosie O'Grady! I'm not going to hurt the boy. He needs every bit he can get."

"Yes—and then he'll go bankrupt when he's back in the world again and away from such as you—if there's any such as you."

"Rosie,"—Mary held her off and spoke with intense conviction—"you know and I know that some things are worth going bankrupt for. Only—he won't go bankrupt. If he has to take pain along with happiness—or after it—he'll only have the bigger treasury in his heart and mind to work with. The boy's a genius, in his way. I want to give him a real chance. Hearing this music is only the preliminary to a plan I have for him—oh, such a plan, Rose! He's going to do the finest thing of his life so far, and it will be worth all it costs—be sure of that."

"I hope so."

"I know so." And Mary rushed away to see Harriet Fenn and give her invitation.

When Rose, that day, had Guy Carter's arm under her skilful fingers, working upon it with one of the long treatments which were slowly but surely releasing it from bondage, she spoke the word to him which was clamouring for utterance. With each day that had gone by she had become surer that it must be spoken.

"Sonny," she began, "do you mind a thing I said to you when I first took you to the big house on the hill?"

"What was that, Miss Rose?" But the arm had given a

twitch beneath her fingers. "About—not thinking myself as good as the place I was going to? Don't worry. I think less of myself every day."

"Nobody wants you to do that. Think as well of yourself as you can—you've every right. It wasn't *that* I was remembering. It was—I think you know. And I'm a bit afraid—the warning's doing no good."

Guy was silent. He turned his head away.

"I'm not going to inquire into your affairs, lad. It's none of my business—that I know. But I just want to say this to you. If you can take what comes to you and be thankful, and let it make you bigger and better—and not eat your heart out with wanting what you can't have—it's all right. You can put it into your music, maybe, where it'll do you no harm."

"Why are you saying this to me?" Guy was trembling a little now. "Have I said or done one thing to—make you think I was a—fool?"

"Not a thing—that you could help. And I'm not blaming you. You wouldn't be human if you could be with such and not be carried away with what you see and hear. I'm just fearing that it'll be too much for you, Guy, lad—this party she plans for you—and when you hear the grand music she talks about, you'll—be thinking thoughts that'll break your heart with the ache of them."

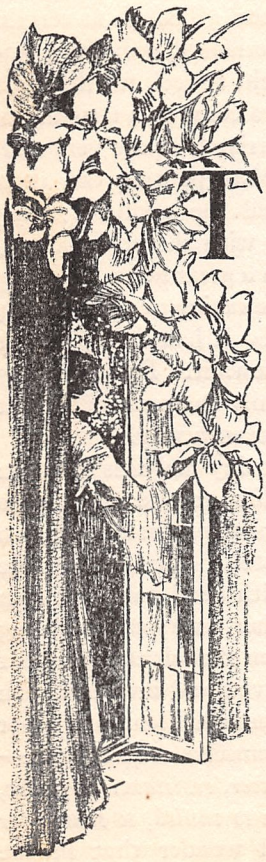
"I don't care." His tone was defiant. "Let me think 'em. I'd rather—than not.—So would you—wouldn't you? —than—not? Even if you never had—what you wanted?"

She looked at him, and into her Irish blue eyes came a touch of mist. She shut them for an instant, pressing her lips together, and Guy noted how the thick lashes met and lay upon her cheek. But when the lashes were raised she was smiling again, with a spirited lift of her round chin.

"That's just what I've been telling you," she said.

# CHAPTER XV

## Beethoven



Symphony No. 9, D Minor, Opus 125
*Ludvig von Beethoven*

Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo: molto vivace
Adagio molto e cantabile
Choral Finale: Schiller's "Hymn to Joy."

THAT was the way the final number of the evening looked on the programme which was afterward put away among Mary Fletcher's choicest treasures. It was beautifully printed on heavy paper of quarto size, a thin book containing the full programmes for the five afternoons and evenings of the May Festival, and illustrated with photographs of the soloists and of the orchestra conductor, himself among the famous of the world. For its own sake it might well be preserved by all music-lovers who turned its pages during those hours. Even Harriet Fenn, who of all Mary's five guests knew least what it was which she had had the privilege of hearing, laid that programme away with the slim pile of such mementoes in a certain desk drawer at home, conscious that it was worthy of its honour.

Mary had heard that Beethoven Ninth Symphony before, once in her life, under circumstances entirely different. With a party of schoolgirls, chaperoned by a teacher, boxes of chocolates in their laps, subdued whisperings on their tongues, Mary had supposed she had listened to the greatest music in the world. Her programme had so informed her, and her teacher had attempted to prepare her, with the rest, for the hearing of the imperishable masterpiece. Though at certain points in the rendition she had experienced something approaching the thrill she knew she ought to feel, for the most part she was secretly wishing things to come to a conclusion. It was really only when the climax arrived, at the very end, with chorus and orchestra and soloists pouring out their utmost in the "Hymn to Joy," and the audience rising spontaneously to its feet, that Mary with the other schoolgirls quite understood that it had been a great hour. As they later emerged into the street they were saying to one another, "Wasn't it perfectly wonderful?" So it had been, but it was more than doubtful if they had known it. Perhaps Mary herself was the only one who even dimly comprehended that they *hadn't* known it, or guessed the reason why.

But she knew now. Between that day and this had lain experience of struggle and pain and life, and he who listens with understanding to the Ninth Symphony must have known these, not vicariously but for himself. Throughout the marvellous first movement she sat with head bent and eyes closed, letting the waves break over her, every nerve strung to tensity. There were moments when she felt the grandeur of the theme unbearable, when she lived and breathed with the composer in his suffering. The words of Richard Wagner interpreting the movement printed themselves on her brain—oh, yes—she knew all about it! "*Power, resistance, to strive, to long, to hope, almost to attain, again to vanish, to search for anew, to struggle again*——" Small wonder that in the

listening she lost all sense of time and space; all that she knew was the sounds which beat upon her ears, the reaction of her whole being to the all but intolerable stimulus of those anguished violins.

The rest was easier to bear. Relief came in the second movement, peace in the third. With the beginning of the fourth pain cried aloud again—a cry of disappointment—imperfect understanding—it made one realize how like life it all was, with no rock upon which to set one's foot. But then came the "Hymn to Joy," with orchestra and chorus lifting the glorious tones to the vast roof. Once again Mary, with an audience on fire, rose to her feet; tears of joy, indeed, at the beauty and might of that outburst of emotion, filling her eyes, her heart beating wildly. Beside her rose Mark Fenn, and on her other side Guy Carter was being helped to his feet by Rose. The boy was crying, too, trying his soldier best not to sob. Mary put out one hand and seized his and pressed it as tight as she could for the convulsive grip his fingers took of hers. Then she looked around at Mark and met his steady gray eyes and saw tears there, too. Quite because she couldn't help it her other hand touched his, and found instant response.

For one minute the three stood linked, gazing toward the orchestra, while the final glory of the "Hymn" surged into their souls, unconscious of all the world outside that magic space. Then it was all over; the applause, thunderous, deafening, began; and the hands dropped apart. Such hours come only now and then in lifetimes, and each of the three recognized that this had been supremely one of those. If it had been raised to its highest power by the human companionship throughout the experience, only one of the three, perhaps, was fully conscious of that significance.

In the memory of each of them the long, swift drive home through the spring night remained as a part of the whole, not

to be forgotten. There was little talk. Harriet Fenn was frankly sleepy; while she had greatly enjoyed the less austere parts of the programmes of the afternoon and evening, the Ninth Symphony had been rather an ordeal. She had had a heavy week of teaching; she had risen at daybreak to make ready for the trip; she had been unable to translate into terms comprehensible to herself the final tremendous composition; she was glad to be able to sit back now in her corner of the car and watch out of half closed eyes the passing loveliness of the spring night.

Dr. Reade and Rose O'Grady were also in a quiet mood; two musical programmes of unusual length had been rather more than they had been able to assimilate with comfort. Both were capable of much enjoyment at such sources, yet the practical, busy lives they led made them less susceptible to the appeal of that which they had heard than the three of the party to whose eyes the "Hymn to Joy" had brought the uncontrollable tears.

But with Mary, Mark, and Guy, though they hardly spoke throughout the drive, absence of speech denoted anything rather than apathy, or even the quite natural fatigue following the long, full day. Each, in his or her own way, was keyed to a high pitch, from which it was impossible as yet to relax. In their ears the music of that last hour was still sounding; every curve of the moonlit road brought fresh scenes to recall poignantly the memories of the sombre themes heard in the first movement of the Symphony, or of the exquisitely melancholy yet peaceful ones of the third. And the "Hymn to Joy!" To each of the three the remembrance of the radiant and soul-stirring motif, appearing now and then in brief ecstatic phrasings, foreshadowing the final outburst, then swelling into its full and overwhelming glory, was something to be cherished with a jealous ardour, lest it fade all too soon.

The last mile was covered, the car flew into the silent town.

"Well," said Harriet, sitting up abruptly, the first to speak in many miles, "here we are! I don't know when I've ever driven at night before. Everybody's sound asleep—hardly a light anywhere. I suppose this is the way"—she turned to Dr. Reade—"you see it pretty often."

"Rather often. I like to see it—once I'm out."

"It's dreaming awake I've been since we left the city," Rose O'Grady said, in a voice quite unlike her own. "Dreaming awake."

As he left her Guy Carter gave Mary an icy hand.

"Were you cold on the drive, Guy?" she asked him solicitously.

"I didn't know I was in the car, I guess.—No, I wasn't cold, thanks."

Mark sent Harriet on ahead up their gravel path to the brown house, giving her the key, and crossed the lawn to meet the car as it came up to the Graham porch. Rose jumped out first and was off into the house, leaving Mary to say goodnight to her last guest. But instead of saying it both lingered.

"Somehow I don't want this day to end," Mary said. The two stood looking off over the silent, sleeping village where, here and there, a belated light shone.

"It's been a great day." Mark lifted his face to the May night sky. "One can go on a long while on the memory of such a day—and evening. I was thinking, on the way home, that if I didn't have to teach to-morrow I'd be spendthrift enough to build a little fire and sit by it the rest of the night and remember that Ninth Symphony."

"I'd like to do that!" There was a happy laugh in Mary's voice. "Go home and to sleep, and I'll do it for you by my fire. *I* don't have to teach to-morrow. There are only two or three hours to daylight, anyhow. I shouldn't sleep if I

tried. I'm going to do it! *I'll* keep faith with the 'Hymn to Joy.'"

"You can't afford to be a spendthrift. I can. If anybody's to keep faith with Beethoven to-night I'll be the one."

They looked at each other, smiling. Neither could be quite sure that the other was serious.

"Are we a pair of sentimentalists? I don't care in the least! I knew I was capable of it but I didn't think you were!"

"You never can tell," Mark acknowledged, "what follies a sober fellow like me can be capable of, when music like that gets into his brain. In all my life I've never been so stirred and exalted, I think. I'd like to prolong the splendour of it. I don't call that sentimentalism. Whatever anybody calls it—I'm going to sit up."

"So am I!"

They didn't argue it. Both knew that if Harriet or Rose O'Grady got wind of the extraordinary compact they would prevent its fulfillment. If they heard of it afterward they would deride it. Even as the pair delayed on the porch they saw Harriet come to the lighted doorway of the brown house and look searchingly across the lawn. But the two figures were in shadow. Harriet went back, leaving the door open.

"Acts speak louder than words. That one says: 'Come, come, brother—don't you know it's two o'clock?'" Mary's low voice was sheer music. For some reason the thought of the coming shared vigil was filling her with an extraordinary pleasure. The idea was preposterous, of course, according to people like Harriet; somehow that made it all the more alluring!

"If I don't go Harry'll come over after me. Will you look out of your window somewhere between now and morning and see my study light burning?"

"Of course I will. And if you look out of yours you'll see

the light of my drawing-room fire. I'll play the *motif* of the 'Hymn to Joy' just as the dawn comes up. If your windows are open perhaps you'll hear it."

"They'll be open—all the time."

Mark went away across the lawn. Mary ran up to her room. She found Rose there, waiting.

"It's into bed you go, and to sleep. You're more weary than you know."

"I'd like to sit up till morning," dared Mary, pulling the pins out of her hair first of all, that she might secure a veil behind which to laugh covertly at her stern young guardian.

"I've no doubt you would; it's just the kind of folly you'd enjoy. And then to-morrow—'Rose, why do I feel so indolent?' Come—slip out of the wickedly costly clothes you would wear to-day, and go to sleep thinking sensible thoughts, not the crazy kind the music's put into you."

"How do you know it's put them in?" The heavy brown locks fell over bare white shoulders now, for Rose's fingers worked fast.

"One can see it in the eyes of you—and of that boy Guy—and even the Professor's a bit daffy, him that has the steady head if anybody has. I won't say I didn't lose my own now and then—with the fiddles singing all together—thinking of France and my soldier boys—and—my old mother—and other things. But I know enough now to go to bed—and do it right-side-to—not taking down my hair while my frock's on!"

"Oh, Rosie O'Grady—what a bark! But your bite's nothing at all." Laughing, Mary made a gesture of futility. In spite of herself her garments had been slipping from her, under Rose's quick hands, and one of fine linen and lace had dropped over her head and slid into place.

"Say your prayers now, and thank the good Lord it occurred to Him to invent sleep—especially for the hare-brained like yourself."

Two minutes later her lights were out, a hand had patted her shoulder, and she was left smiling to herself in the dark. She knew well enough—or thought she knew—that Rose herself would be in bed in two minutes more, and asleep in five. She lay waiting, stretching out deliciously, and admitting to herself that she was extremely comfortable and that Rose had upon her side all the rules of common sense. Nevertheless, at the end of what seemed a safe period she rose cautiously, dressed, and stole downstairs to the silent, shadowy drawing-room.

She softly kindled a fire, drew up a chair beside it, then went to one of the long windows facing toward the small brown house beyond the hedge, and standing behind the curtains looked across. At first she thought there was no light in the study windows, and suffered a pang of disappointment. Had Harriet, then, been as ruthless as Rose and sternly driven her brother to his bed? Nonsense!—Mark wasn't that sort. As she gazed, her eyes discerned the slight rise and fall of a dim light beyond the two windows—open, as she now discovered. It was plain enough that there was a fire upon the study hearth, and no lamplight. Softly she opened her own window, and set the two glass doors of it back against the wall. The night was mild, her fire would be all the warmth she needed—and somehow those open study windows across the lawn gave her the sense of being companioned. She knew as well as if she could see him that Mark was sitting before his fire, looking into it—perhaps drawing musingly on his pipe—perhaps not. She wondered a little about that, and decided that being a man he would have the pipe, but that—possibly, as he thought of the Ninth Symphony, he might forget to keep it alight!

She went back to her seat by her own fire. It didn't occur to her to wish that Mark were here, on the other side of the fireplace, talking with her, or even sitting in silence. She

distinctly didn't wish that; there was something about the keeping of this extraordinary tryst which actual companionship in the flesh would have spoiled for her. No—it wasn't a tryst with each other they were keeping, really; it was one with the great music they had heard; the whole point of their doing this thing at the same time was that for them both it was a sacred hour, and each must keep it alone or miss its full beauty. Yet there was undeniably a heightening of that beauty by the thought that another human being felt in the same way about it; it was one of those discoveries of close similarities of tastes and feelings that make one feel less alone in the world, and arouse a joyful surprise at the happy fact. That Mark Fenn, sanest and safest of beings, according to all that people knew of him, could care to do this thing which would be reckoned more or less erratic by ordinary sensible people, gave Mary Fletcher the keenest pleasure. Nothing that he could have done, in the course of everyday existence, could have so made him seem akin or so interested her in himself.

It was a short vigil. By May light comes early, and it seemed to Mary that she had been looking into the fire and "dreaming awake," as Rose had said—yes, even practical Rose had said that, earlier in this night of nights—but an hour when, on an excursion to the window which faced the east, she discerned the first hint of coming dawn. She stood watching it until she was sure that the low clouds were beginning to flush a very little, then she went to the piano. She put her foot on the soft pedal, and sat wondering if Rose would hear.

Her hands were trembling a little; it was astonishing how great a matter it seemed it was going to be to strike those first low chords. Over and over again she softly fingered them, until, suddenly realizing that the faint light was actually beginning to steal into the dim room, she determinedly

pressed the keys. Once begun, however, she forgot everything except the wish to bring back to her own ears and to those which must be listening across the way the memory of a wonderful hour. So she played on, bringing out the phrases with muffled power, until the room rang softly with the basic melody of the "Hymn to Joy" and her own vivid imagination supplied all that orchestra and voices had lent to the perfect whole. As for the imagination across the way——

As her hands dropped into her lap, and she sat with fast-beating pulses looking at the shadowy line of the keyboard, something fell beside her upon the bench. A little bunch of white violets among green leaves, fresh and dewily cool, lay there gleaming softly in the dusky light. She caught them up, breathing in their fresh fragrance, looking toward the window. Nobody was to be seen, and nothing could have made her run to the window to see whose was the retreating figure—she knew it could be but one. Besides—there was a big bed of white and purple violets beneath the study windows; no need to wonder how he had got them for her. It was a charming token, and if it was undeniably romantic, all the better for that. No surprise could have been greater than to have Mark Fenn attest his faithfulness to the compact of the night in this—to one of Mary's temperament—perfectly logical and fitting way. There was really nothing else he could have done, she reflected, unless to throw a note in at her—and that would have been commonplace beside a bunch of white violets with the freshness of the May night upon them. Altogether, their arrival satisfied her desire to know that he had heard her music—and it really didn't matter what happened next!

What she confidently expected to have happen next was the sound of Rose's step upon the stairs, but in this she was disappointed. Now that it was all over, and the daylight

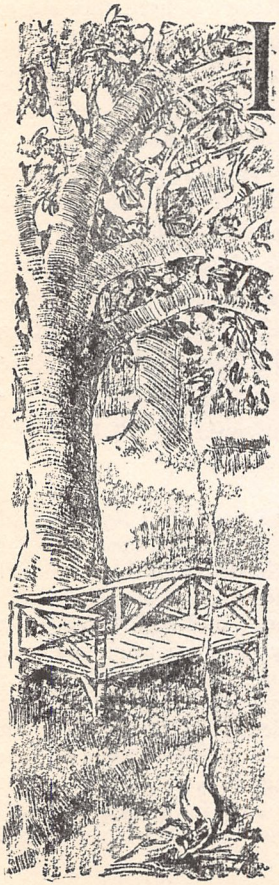
momentarily growing brighter, while the dying fire flickered to a smoulder on the ashy hearth, she rather longed to be properly punished. Nothing would now have pleased her better than to turn from sentiment to gayety and flout Rose's strictures on her folly with a merry laugh. She mounted the stairs without much stealth, hoping against hope to hear Rose's door open and Rose's delightfully stern yet mellow voice with its touch of brogue challenge her on the top step. But all remained silent. There was nothing left to do but to return to her room, close the door, put the violets in water, and slip out of her garments and into bed.

Sleep did not come quickly, though she was conscious now that she was thoroughly tired. When it did come, it was deep and long. And when it was over she had her wish. She woke to find a pencilled slip of paper pinned to the blanket on her bed, and recognized with satisfaction Rose's handwriting, round and curly, like herself. The little travelling clock on her table near by marked the hour of eleven. Rose had been long gone to her work, but she had left this decidedly tangible reminder of a personality to be reckoned with.

There's many kinds of craziness in the world, but few to equal that which leaves the windows and doors downstairs open all night and plays music to the stars—and the windows next door—and all sensible folk that are trying to sleep. Get up now, and take a bath cold enough to bring the blood out of your wild brain—and don't forget the exercises that I'm hoping may some day bring you back to a proper balance. There's few like you in the world—and that's lucky, because such foolishness is catching, and it's the whole night I've lain awake myself, minding the music that pulled the heart out of my body and pinned it on my sleeve—where it listened to your "Hymn to Joy" and cried big blithering tears. And that's what comes of sentiment—making everybody unfit for good hard work! So no more of it, says Rose O'Grady—and I'm glad I had what I had, and thank you kindly—*and don't do it again.*

# CHAPTER XVI

## White Fire



IN HIS office the editor of *The Centre-piece* was looking over a copy of the June issue, fresh off the press. It was a number in the preparation of which he had taken a peculiar pleasure, for the reason that it contained the most gratifying "find" that had come his way in many moons. Since the day that Sibley Langley's manuscript had reached his desk, endorsed by his most discerning reader—"*Different!*" with a big dash under the word—and that particular reader wasn't often taken off her feet—he had been eager for the day when he might mail a copy of the magazine containing that amazingly shining piece of work to Mary Fletcher. It had been rushed into print as fast as the illustrator, tearing his hair over the imperative order, could make the pictures for it. It now appeared leading all the rest, a tribute to the fact that the joy in editorial offices over a perfectly new author whose work promises that something "different" and distinctive so anx-

iously and often despairingly sought, is as real as any satisfaction over the arrival of copy from the hand of the already famous.

Kirkwood dashed off a note to go with the magazine, which he had ordered sent to Miss Fletcher in the outgoing mail.

I'm counting on your congratulations! There never was a more generous reader of other people's work than you, and your eyes will rest as gloatingly as mine on this drop out of the skies of "Sibley Langley." Of course she's a woman, and a young one, at that. She's a wonder, and too good to be true; but she *is* true, and there's more of her to come. We've made a big departure in showing a photograph of her in our list of contributors, but we've several more manuscripts of hers already in hand, and so know this first story isn't just a flash in the pan. I wish you two could meet—I can imagine no pair more congenial. To tell the truth, it seems to me there's a certain quality in her work which reminds me of you—a quality which, of course, is only in its incipiency with her, while in you it is developed to its highest power. But—here's hoping! I know you'll hope with me.

The letter added a friendly paragraph on other lines, but made no further allusion to Mary as an author. It ended with warm wishes for the coming summer and the desire that before very long she would feel that she could see the writer—quite outside his editorial capacity. It asserted that he was ever faithfully—and devotedly—hers; and the signature was written with a dash which suggested haste and tension.

Leaving the office, magazine and letter already despatched, Kirkwood went out of his way to stop at a small shop where an old Frenchman was accustomed to do the finest work in hand binding and tooling known in the city. He worked slowly and took few orders, but those who could secure his services were considered privileged persons. Among his leathers Kirkwood found him, and spent an hour cajoling

him into accepting a small order which was to be executed with the greatest care, and in selecting the material and style for the commission.

"This is a little priceless jewel, you see, Le Maire," Kirkwood said, as he finally turned over the short manuscript. "When it comes from your hands I want it to look the part."

The Frenchman nodded. "*Je comprend*," he replied. "It is pairfectly clear. Monsieur will haf nossing but pairfection. I execute nossing but pairfection."

Kirkwood laughed. "Exactly! We understand each other. I will call once a week till you give me the order—and I will pay well for as much haste as possible."

Le Maire shook his head. "I know not ze word," he said. "Pairfection—and haste; zey go not togezzer."

"I didn't mean haste," Kirkwood amended, smiling. "I meant undelayed effort—prolonged to completion. If Le Maire executes the work nothing short of perfection is possible—that I understand."

In due course he received Mary's acknowledgment of his letter and the accompanying magazine. He had looked for it for some time before it came, yet was not surprised at the delay. It thanked him very pleasantly for introducing her to the work of Sibley Langley and praised the sample of it he had sent her with a fair degree of warmth. Certainly nothing was really lacking in that praise—and yet, to Kirkwood, knowing Mary's tendency to burst into flame over fine craftsmanship, the full enthusiasm of appreciation he had looked for wasn't quite there. Had he looked for it? Rather had he looked for the lack—had a keen eye for it—and rejoiced when he thought he found it.

"Just a bit jealous, Mary?" he questioned her imaginary self before him, and puffed harder on the pipe he was smoking, with a satisfied twist in the corner of his expressive lips.

"Well—you need to be made a bit jealous, my dear. You're settling down too comfortably into taking care of yourself. If we don't look out you'll be taking up gardening, or thoroughbred puppies, or some other absurd activity. And then what? If you're really well again—and you must be, by now—it's the part of a friend to stir you up."

So he wrote back, almost by return mail, that he was coming her way. Her letter had indicated that the next time that happened he might stop off to see her. He had something to show her—something he had obtained for her—which he could send to her by mail, if she preferred, but—it would cost him keen disappointment if he might not bring it to her in person. Of course—this really went without saying—it had nothing to do with her work. It was just a thing he had wanted to do for her, and now that he had done it he wanted to put it into her hands himself—as a small boy, having laboured over the drawing of a locomotive, desires to hand it round and receive congratulations. Please?

It was the first day of June that, having received the desired permission, John Kirkwood, piloted by Eliza, walked through the wide hall of the old Graham house to the open door at the back which gave upon the rear porch. Standing beside the housekeeper he looked with interest off over the garden with its box borders and its masses of early summer flowers, to the orchard beyond. He hadn't realized how inviting it all was, up here in Mary's country home.

"Miss Mary thought she'd be back before you got here," Eliza explained. "There's a path down through the orchard—you'll find a fence and gateway at the back of it and a bit of wood. It's a pretty walk, and she often takes it. You might walk along and meet her, if you like. Or you can sit here on the porch. It's quite warm to-day."

The broad rear porch was a pleasant enough place, for rugs and wicker chairs and table made of it an outdoor living-room

upon which the long windows of the drawing-room opened invitingly. But it had no charms for the editor compared with those of going to meet his hostess. He set off at once through the box borders, carrying his hat in his hand, and stopping to pluck a sprig of the box to stick in his buttonhole. He had passed through the orchard and proceeded for some distance along a wooded path before he caught sight of the figure he was looking for, and hastened his steps to meet it.

He had been thinking a good deal of Sibley Langley on the way up in the train. She had been a "find," not only on account of the thing she could do with such freshness and vivacity, but because she was distinctly attractive of person to the jaded editor's fancy. It wasn't often that the two attributes met so intriguingly in one. Miss Langley was a young New Yorker, just out of Columbia, living in a small apartment with her mother, and Kirkwood had gone to see her there after reading that first manuscript. She was a tiny creature, with velvet-brown eyes, masses of corn-coloured hair, and a picturesque way of dressing. Exceedingly quick of wit, daring of speech and manner, yet distinctly able to keep herself and everybody else in hand—Kirkwood had thus far enjoyed to the full the contact with her brought about by her successful appeal to his professional judgment. He had made the most of the relation of editor to contributor to give himself and Miss Langley some satisfying hours.

Her work, as yet, couldn't touch Mary Fletcher's—to himself he frankly admitted that. But Mary had several years the advantage of her in age and experience; and it might easily be, he told himself, that with a physical vitality which seemed never to fail her, Sibley Langley could overtake and pass Mary on a road where endurance as well as equipment tells heavily in the long run. Mary had gone to pieces early—too early; he hadn't been able to forget that last interview he had had with her; it had left upon his mind the fore-

boding that she might never again be the workman she had been. He was sorry, first and foremost from the editorial point of view. He was still more sorry as the memory which recalled the painful interview so vividly also brought back persistently to his mental vision the picture of loveliness she had presented when she first came into the house from her drive with Fenn—before she caught sight of Kirkwood himself. His heart had grown warm within him at sight of her. It was the remembrance of that unexpected sensation which, after all, had brought him now to see her. Sibley Langley, with all her stimulating vivacity, hadn't been able to efface the impression of a magnetic personality that Mary had always made upon him. As he walked along the woods path to meet her he was aware of being agreeably keyed to anticipation.

But he wasn't prepared for the Mary he now saw coming toward him round a bend in the path. Possibly if he had known a little more of Rose O'Grady he would have understood that it was she who was mainly responsible. Those increasingly cold baths, those exercises, not to mention early hours and much sleep—all had done their work. The girl who came to meet him on the path—she looked a girl—was not, couldn't be, the frail though interesting creature whom two months before he had had to deal with as half invalid and wholly under the domination of a mental obsession about his influence over her. This was a vigorous young person, who came along with a rapid, free step, her face like a ripe peach with outdoor life, her eyes clear and steady, everything about her proclaiming that in all her days she had never been so well or so strong, or so full of the joy of living. The very crisp lines of the apricot linen she wore seemed a part of the changed picture. When he had last seen her she had been wearing soft and clinging folds of a dull-blue silk!

He stood still in the path, hat in hand, and waited for her

to come up to him, as if he had been struck motionless by the sight of her. But she was smiling at his sober face. Her hand was extended with frank and friendly greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. John Kirkwood, and it's glad I am to see you, as Rosie O'Grady would say. The top of the morning to you—and it's on top of the world I am—and I hope you are the same."

"I am, indeed, to see you like this. The Irish brogue is contagious, is it?—as well as the good health of the nurse. You're almost as rosy as Miss O'Grady herself, as I recall her. And"—he added in his own mind— "a deal more enchanting to look at."

He stood regarding her intently, and her eyes met his without evasion. It was she who now showed solicitude. "Dear, dear!—but how worn the editor looks! I haven't seen a man from the Big Town for so long I'd forgotten that harried expression. How could you stop rushing about long enough to come up here into the calm country where the clocks give us ten sleeping hours a night? You look as if it would do you good to have a nap this minute. Come along back to the porch and I'll put you on the couch till lunch time."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. The sleeper was hot as blazes, that's all, and I probably show a bit of hang-over from the cindery night. Half an hour in this heavenly place will make me fit as a fiddle. I'll admit I'd like to find a shady spot and sit down in it—with you."

She nodded. "I've some rustic benches in the orchard. I put them there when the apple and peach blossoms were out. Talk of heavenly places—you should have seen it then."

She led the way. Kirkwood's anticipation of the hour to come mounted with each step beside her. Her dark hair, carefully dressed so that each soft wave of it was lustrous

with the effect of health which was all about her, the curve of her richly hued cheek, the gesture of her half-bare arm brown with tan—every aspect of her gave him delight. He thought again—and for the last time for a considerable period —of Sibley Langley, and knew that he had been mistaken in thinking—or rather in trying to think—that he had found in her just such another as Mary Fletcher. There was no such another in the world—certainly not while he was with her. And he had never thought that of Sibley Langley, even while he was with her.

He was conscious, as they sat down upon the bench in the orchard, that he was about to do a thing which afforded him peculiar satisfaction. Two days earlier he had gone to the book-bindery and had brought away, in a silk-covered case of its own, the slim book upon which the Frenchman had lavished his imagination, and which he had given into Kirkwood's hands solemnly, as if with a rite. The editor had praised him with words which had made the artist workman flush with pride and happiness and respond eagerly: "It is pairfect, Monsieur, though I, who did it, say so. Me, I never did a more finished little piece. Take it—and let the hands often caress it—it is better so, for the leather."

He put off for a little, however, the giving of his gift, because for the moment it was quite enough to be with her. Although he had spent many hours in her society over her work, or on the expeditions in search of material which they had taken together, it was a new sensation to be sitting with her in such a place as this country apple orchard, withdrawn from the world, all June about them. The very sound of her voice was a felicity; he could hardly believe it the same voice which he had last heard speaking tremulously of unhappy things.

"What am I doing to fill my time?"—She repeated his question.—"Oh, a thousand things. I never was so busy."

"I suppose you don't gather the eggs—or milk the cows? Perhaps you pick the strawberries? I came past a big patch of them. Of course you go out with a basket and cut flowers for the house every morning?"

She laughed. "You have a great idea of activities in the country, haven't you? Strawberries and flowers—yes, when I have time—which I mostly don't. I go for a horseback ride every morning—after a class I attend at the college. Then——"

"A class! That's interesting. In what? Domestic science?"

"In dramatic expression and play-writing. It's wonderfully interesting. I went at first to take a young wounded soldier friend of mine, but now I go for my own sake."

Kirkwood's eyebrows lifted quizzically. "A young wounded soldier friend! Very romantic. Are you going to write a play between you?"

"I hope so. In fact, we're working at a set of songs which might fit into a musical play. He's a composer. Did you happen to see '*Present Arms!*'?"

"What?" The eyebrows drew together in a frown. "Of course you don't mean you're working with the composer of '*Present Arms!*'"

"Yes—isn't it great luck? He's a wonder and he's going to be more of a one. He's frightfully crippled, you see, and so he needs to be doing something to take his mind off himself."

"I've no doubt working with Mary Fletcher does it. But—see here, Mary. I thought you were forbidden all work for a long time."

"This isn't work, it's the most delightful play I could find."

He considered it. "I can't quite imagine a course at Newfane College——"

"Newcomb——" she corrected him.

"Newcomb—I beg its pardon. You see, it's never been on my map. I can't imagine a course in play-writing there anything but—a sort of kindergarten."

"Can't you? The instructor is Mr. Perry Gilfillan."

Now he was astonished indeed. He couldn't believe it. Perry Gilfillan needed no introduction, of course, but it didn't seem quite possible that——

Mary was laughing. "But he's here, and you must admit I should be losing my chance if I didn't belong to his classes. You see, if you just could grasp the idea that such people as Mr. Gilfillan can sometimes be found in places outside of Harvard and Columbia! To be sure, he's here only for this year, but that doesn't mean that there aren't other men here just as well worth while as he, if they aren't as famous. President Wing—why—you must know who William Westcott Wing is. He's the author of a group of books on psychology that are known everywhere."

She had him there. He was bound to know such books; but it hadn't occurred to him that their author could be one and the same with the head of the small and—to him—obscure college. He was rather more impressed by these two facts than he was willing to admit, and presently he had steered the conversation to grounds safer for himself. Mary had begun to tell him a list of famous graduates of Newcomb —he didn't want to hear them.

"I shall begin to feel, if you keep on," he said in the rallying tone she well remembered, "that I can never amount to anything myself because I'm only Princeton."

"It's a handicap," she admitted gaily, "but you may be able to live it down."

He drew his thin parcel from his pocket. "Before you have me cornered any more hopelessly, I'm going to show you what I came to bring you. I really don't think I can wait much longer, anyhow."

"I'm so eager to see it."

He looked at her. "Are you? But you'll be willing to wait while I tell you a bit about it."

"Of course." She settled herself in her corner of the rustic seat.

His manner had changed. He spoke gravely. "I happen to know a man," he began, "a few years out of college—ten years out of preparatory school—who in the course of a talk with me on some material he had which he thought would make a good article, showed me some letters from the headmaster of that school. They seemed to him very remarkable letters. When I read them I felt as he did about them—except that he had known and loved the headmaster, and I hadn't. But they certainly were remarkable letters—he hadn't overrated them. They were written after his expulsion from the school, and they were intended to prevent his going off the track with anger and disappointment and recklessness. Imagine the conditions. It had been absolutely out of the question to retain him in the school; he had been found out in an act so flagrant that it would have been a tremendous injury to both himself and the other boys to keep him. It would have been against all laws of justice. The school was well rid of him and his sort. And yet—this headmaster, who was one of the greatest of his kind, couldn't let him go—he had to follow him with these letters. They did what they were intended to do—kept him from going to smash. When I had finished reading them I thought of you. I thought you might like to have them in permanent form. In the nature of the case they couldn't be given publicity, the story was too well known. But for private preservation—well—here they are."

Mary was staring at him. Her eyes now fell to the parcel in his hands, which he was taking from its wrappings. The blue silk-covered case came to view, containing the slender

book. Kirkwood drew this out and put it into Mary's hands.

"I wanted very much," he said, in a low tone, "to do something for you. This was the best—the very best—thing I could find to do." And he laid the book in her lap.

She sat looking down at it in silence and wonder. Outwardly it was, as far as a book may be, like some fine jewel. The deep lapis blue of the leather which bound it, the exquisite hand tooling of the designs which formed its border and backing, gold and rose and green in hues, made of it something very perfect to look at. From the centre of the cover shone in small lettering the title: "Letters of Arthur Rand Fletcher, Headmaster, to an ex-Schoolboy."

With fingers whose touch caressed, Mary opened the covers on the inner facing of blue silk bordered with gold which gave the last touch of sumptuous detail to the binding. Within, heavy white pages with wide borders met her eye, but there was no printing upon them. Instead, there appeared a perfect facsimile of the letters themselves, photographed from the original and then engraved upon copper—the costliest mode of reproduction known to art. Altogether, it was impossible not to recognize that John Kirkwood had lavished upon the small volume every consideration in his power. Mary's own initials upon the centre of the back cover of the book seemed to sign and seal its delivery into her hands. Here was a gift unique—one of which there could be no duplicate in the world. That the daughter of Arthur Fletcher should not be touched by such a tribute was inconceivable.

"Would you like to read them by yourself?" questioned Kirkwood. "Or might I have the great happiness of reading them to you? It shall be just as you say. Only I want you to know that never have I, in all my life, read anything that so stirred me, or—did more to make a better man of me.

Still—perhaps you *would* like to read them alone. Forgive me for suggesting the other."

"Oh, but I think you've earned the right to read them to me. Please do," she said, quickly, and put the book into his hands.

Before he began to read Kirkwood described to her briefly what the schoolboy, now a man of his own age, had become; how he had reached a position of honour and influence; and how he ascribed it all to these six letters which had reached out after him, boyishly breathing fire and brimstone against the school which had dismissed him, and had turned his youthful cursings into tears of repentance. He couldn't go back, but he could go to another school, as the letters urged, and could there retrieve himself. This he had done. He had done it so well that there had been another letter, which he would share with nobody, of which he was more proud than of any recognition which had ever come to him.

"And that's saying a good deal," Kirkwood finished, "for he's made a name for himself already. I wish I could tell it to you, but both he and I felt that the letters would have more value for you if they remained impersonal, and you could treasure them solely for the new and shining light they shed on your father's character. It needed no more lustre, yet—the lustre is here."

And he began to read.

Throughout the reading she remained motionless. It lasted for not more than ten minutes; there were six letters in all, of varying lengths. Kirkwood read them reverently and with tellingly restrained emphasis—it could not have been better done.

As a revelation of the great heart which had inspired them, of the sensitive, understanding spirit which had conceived them, of the virility of the man who sought so to impress his beliefs and ideals upon this wild young nature which he had

sent against his will away from him, that it might not altogether escape his lasting influence, the letters were human documents of rare worth. As an example of sheer genius in dealing with youth and audacity, so as not to alienate but to capture and hold it against all odds, they were marvels of wisdom and diplomacy. But to Mary they meant more than even these. The personality of Arthur Fletcher seemed imprisoned beyond loss in the letters, as by almost no memorial she had of him. They had been struck off at white heat under intense grief and longing to save the soul of a boy—and they had saved it, they could hardly do otherwise. What a record to have had preserved to his daughter!

When Kirkwood had finished he added no word of comment—to have done so at the moment would have been a desecration. It was a long while before Mary spoke, and while he waited he refrained from looking at her. But when her smothered words came at last he turned to see the look in her face—he couldn't miss that.

"You were right," she said, with difficulty. "I didn't know such letters were ever written, though I always thought my father wrote the most wonderful letters in the world. But nothing like these—nothing like them. Oh—I can't thank you—I can't!"

"I am thanked," he answered simply.

He sat watching Arthur Fletcher's daughter pass warm and loving fingers over and over the blue of the leather and the gold of the inscription, as if she were somehow touching her father's hand. The editor's heart had never been so warm with the best that was in him as in this hour. This thing that he had been inspired to do for her had broken down the barrier between them, he felt sure. It was the sort of thing to take hold of her imagination, to call forth her gratitude, as well as her recognition of his sensitiveness to that which would mean much to her. He had been entirely sincere in

his admiration of the surpassing beauty and manly valour of those letters; in all his experience he had never come upon anything to touch them; it was his sincerity in making them into this appealing gift which she was bound to recognize and appreciate.

Presently they returned to the house and had luncheon there, with Rose O'Grady. Learning from Mary on the previous day that the editor was expected, Rose had said with a little twist of her Irish mouth:

"It's playing with fire you are, is it? Well, just keep a couple of pails of water handy—and don't wait till you get a conflagration before you're throwing them on. I'm not your nurse now; I can't be keeping folks off with my two fists."

"He's just an old friend, Rose—not my collaborator any more, you know. There's nothing to fear from having him come now that I'm myself again. There are no sentimental relations between us—there never have been."

"Well, confidence is a good thing," Rose admitted. "I'm glad you've plenty of it. You may need it all. As I said—I'm not your nurse now. You'll best be minding that. It's a handy thing, now and then, to have someone at hand to stick a thermometer under an old friend's tongue and prevent speech."

Mary had laughed at this, and had told Rose she was by no means to fail her at luncheon time on the morrow.

"I might have Mr. Fenn over too, to balance the table," she had reflected.

Whereat Rose had grinned and shaken her head. "To balance the table, is it? More likely to unbalance it, Mary dear. Who wants to see the two of them passing the time of day to each other—and little more? No—keep them apart—that's my advice. They care nothing for each other's company—you can be sure of that."

Mary had taken her by the shoulders. "Stop talking as if

they——Why, I won't *have* it! Neither of them is anything but a good friend. They've no possible reason to dislike each other."

"Haven't they? Faith, men are queer creatures. Under some circumstances they dislike each other for less reason than a pair of eyes and a voice like Mary Fletcher's. You'll never see them two walking down the street arm in arm, you know—so don't be looking for it.—And I'll not have time to change my uniform, to come to your table, so don't be looking for that, either."

Rose in the crisp white of her uniform was a pleasant sight, nevertheless. She was on her best behaviour, too, as she met the editor on the shaded rear porch, where luncheon was served. She saw him now at his best; she had to acknowledge to herself that she had seldom heard cleverer or more entertaining talk. In high content over the success of his presentation, Kirkwood laid himself out to be the guest who gives as much as he receives, and he kept his two companions on their mettle to respond to him.

When the hour was over and Rose gone, however, Kirkwood's mood appeared to change. He grew grave and rather silent, and presently suggested that he and Mary return to the bench in the orchard. It was a charming spot, he said, and the furthest possible remove from the type of sophisticated environment to which he was too used. He'd like to remember that orchard.

So it was the rustic bench under the gnarled old trees which was the scene of a fresh crisis in Mary's life—not the sort against which Rose had seemed to warn her, but one as significant as any which she had yet met.

"You wrote me very satisfyingly," Kirkwood began rather suddenly, "of your liking for the work of our new contributor. Having said all that as agreeably as you would say it, I'd very much like to know your real opinion of her."

Mary looked at him, to find his suddenly piercing gaze fixed upon her. As a matter of fact she had never, in all these years, become quite accustomed to meeting the direct glance of those eyes; she had always wanted to evade it. Just what it was which disturbed her she had no notion; but the fact remained. The sensation had always been, as it was now, of an acuteness of perception which amounted to mind reading. In any case, she felt that she couldn't escape answering by evasions which would put off a man of a different sort.

Therefore she considered a little before she spoke, her eyes upon the book of her father's letters which she had brought with her again. "I did give you my honest opinion," she said. "I felt, with you, that she was a 'find.' I didn't wonder you were rejoicing. Her originality is delicious; her style is remarkably finished, at the same time that it seems spontaneous. Altogether——" But here she paused.

"Yes, it's the 'altogether' I want," declared Kirkwood. "Or rather, the 'nevertheless' which I judge it will be, if you're honest."

"Do you want to drive me to criticism?"

"Exactly that. I know you must have it. She's young, you know—she'll grow, I expect. Making allowance for her youth—what is it you find lacking?"

"Nothing."

He hadn't expected that. Neither did he quite believe it. His look bored deeper. "You can't quite mean that?"

"I mean just that. You must remember you're asking me to judge her on a very insufficient basis. But, judging by that one story, which took you off your feet, she has all you are looking for."

Kirkwood got up from the bench and took a turn up and down the uneven turf of the orchard, hands in his pockets. When he paused again before Mary, who sat looking at him

with a sort of serene content with her own verdict mingled with a little amusement at his apparent disconcertion, he spoke abruptly.

"You're a wonder. I thought from your letter about Sibley Langley that you were only human after all. I think now you must be superhuman."

"Indeed—why? Can no woman appreciate another?"

"Yes, but she invades your field. Don't you see?"

"Let her invade it. I don't mind," asserted Mary, smiling up at him.

A little stung, Kirkwood determined upon a frankness he hadn't been sure whether to employ, in the degree, at least, which he now felt possible.

"Mary," he asked, watching her closely, "will you permit me to mention, for business purposes, and for just a moment, a matter we discussed when I saw you last?"

"Your book?"

"*Your* book. Would you be willing to have Sibley Langley finish it?"

The colour rushed into her face, which had had no lack of it before. But she continued to meet his gaze steadily.

"You consider it my book, though it's your idea?"

"Absolutely yours. I agreed to destroy it, if you wished, didn't I? Do you still wish that? I can't look at you and not know that you've completely recovered from the state of mind you were in at that time. You don't want me to treat you as an invalid now?"

She shook her head. "Certainly not. I can hardly believe now that I could be so weak and irrational. Say what you wish. But—you can hardly expect me to be willing to have another hand finish work which I began?"

"No—I don't wish it—nor ask it. But, Mary—it was a splendid beginning. You have no idea, I know, what work you did. A night or two ago I sat up till two in the morning

to go over the ten chapters you finished. For a first draft they're—well—they're marvellous. It's a crime not to go on. I say it for your own sake—believe me—far more than for my own. That book will make you famous. Without undue pressure, working only as you wanted to, devoting another whole winter to it, if you needed that much time——"

He went over the ground while she listened. He saw to his relief that there were no evidences in her face or manner that a shred of her former hysteria on the subject remained to harass her. She seemed to be considering the matter with perfect self-possession. Her colour, indeed, was still vivid—it was an exquisite cheek at which he gazed as he talked. He had taken his seat beside her again, and she sat looking straight before her, no longer meeting his eyes. He used every art of persuasion he knew, and then rested his case.

Mary got up and went a few steps to lean against the trunk of an apple tree, facing him, her hands boyishly thrust into the sash of her tunic. Kirkwood walked around behind the bench and stood facing her, his arms crossed upon the high back. The attitude of both was reminiscent of past hours of discussion over plans for the book, when neither could remain quietly sitting, but must range about bodily as well as mentally, in search of ideas. Mary had said once that she didn't think there was any article of furniture in the living-room of her apartment that hadn't been used to support elbows, during the cogitations of the collaborators.

Now, as she stood looking at the ground, her lips opened once or twice as if speech were upon them; then closed again. Finally she lifted her eyes and met Kirkwood's. This time she did not let her own shift from his until the thing was said.

"If I can't do what you ask," she said, "it's because you yourself have driven the last nail in my resolution not to do it."

"What!"

"I want you to know," she went on in a level tone, "that ever since I was myself again—and somehow I think I'm rather more than myself now—I've been thinking about that book. Not in the morbid way I was doing when you came up before—that's all like some frightful nightmare, slipped away into the past so far I can't believe I ever dreamed it. But thinking of it—with longing. As far as my ability to work is concerned, I never was so fit. I could finish the book in a dozen flying leaps—I know I could. And I'd like to do it.—I mean—if I can make you understand—with one side of me I'd like to do it. And I'd like—to see your face when I had done it!"

His face at the moment was certainly a study in expressions. With all his experience in concealing his emotions, he was revealing now both eagerness and mystification.

"Of course," she continued, with a little rueful smile, "being a woman, I was instantly jealous of your new 'find.' If for no other reason the photograph of her in the magazine would have roused my envy. She's adorably pretty—and—I could easily guess how attractive in personality she must be from her unexpected way of putting things in her pages. As for her ability—I've told you honestly how I feel about that. Well—anyhow, she made me think more than ever about the book, and the possibility of finishing it. Why should I let this new star eclipse me? I assure you—it's been the biggest temptation of my life—to finish that book."

But at this he interrupted with sudden fire. "Why should you call it a temptation? In Heaven's name—why that? Why shouldn't you finish what your judgment allowed you to begin?"

"Because—why—you've just said it. In Heaven's name—I can't!"

They regarded each other steadily. If John Kirkwood

had ever felt that he could sway and control Mary Fletcher's mind and will, he knew now that he had lost that power. He was wild with pain at the thought, and yet—curiously enough—and logically enough, after all—he had never been so interested in her, so absorbed in the wish to come nearer to her and pursue this fresh study of her at close range. This was a new Mary. Desirable as she had always been to him, both as a writer and as a woman, she had in the twinkling of an eye become infinitely more desirable. As for the strange new beauty of her, as she stood there, it was almost more than he could bear.

"I don't understand you," he said, after a minute. But he knew he did. Her meaning was in her face, over which had come an indescribable look, not so much of renunciation as of exaltation.

"My mind was made up before you came," she went on slowly. "At least, I thought it was, though I knew it might be difficult for me to keep it made. I remembered your wonderful powers of persuasion—and—I remembered the fascination of work with you. I knew when you saw how completely I have recovered and how well I am, you would talk to me about the book. If you hadn't brought it up I should have, myself. The thing had to be settled again on a new basis than that of the author's breakdown. And I knew it might be hard to resist you. But"—and here she looked down at the thin blue leather-bound book which she had brought back with her to the orchard, as if it were too precious to lay aside as yet—"you brought me my defense against you. Why—John Kirkwood—how can any argument of yours get past—*that!*" And she held it up before him, clasped in her two hands and pressed against her breast.

He was silent, biting his lip with disappointment and chagrin. The thing he had meant to soften her heart toward

him had only put iron into her will against him. Was ever such a weapon turned upon him who had forged it?

Mary was opening it to a page, toward the end of the last letter in the book. She read it aloud, and in her voice was something Kirkwood had never heard there before. In spite of himself the hearing moved him too.

> You're full of fire, lad—and I'm glad of that. Fire is a good thing—under control. But I want yours to be a white fire—not a purple and yellow flame, dulling and smoking things up—but clear white—and bright—like the sunlight. *The white fire*, Sam—try for that!

She looked at him. In her eyes were no tears, yet the effect of tears was there—and joy and pride.

"I would rather," she said, "have had my father the author of words like those, and the influence that changed hundreds of boys' lives, than have had him—oh, achieve the most brilliant literary triumph that—left God out. 'White Fire!' You've given me my new creed, John Kirkwood—and I'm everlastingly grateful to you for it. Don't you see? The fire that's in your book isn't white fire—and I can't write it. I can't write it. Don't you see? Oh, I *want* you to see!"

If it had been his personality which had dominated her in the past, for the moment at least the tables were turned. Never had the man been so under the power of any emotion as Kirkwood was just then. Infinitely desirable, hopelessly unattainable—or so she seemed even though she had suddenly and quickly crossed the space between them and laid one beseeching hand upon his arm—at that moment Mary could do with him what she would. He looked into her eyes with his own kindling to match them, and the best that was in him once more responded to her challenge, as the best in man ever does when a woman he respects calls for it.

He looked down at the hand upon his arm, then gently lifted it to his lips.

"I see," he said.

Two days after he had gone Mary's manuscript came back to her through the registered mails. With it came a brief note.

I want you to know that the thing I said to you, in the spring, to quiet your fears and make you well, I say again now, and mean it—in a different way. The book is yours—you may destroy it yourself. I can't—the association with you has meant too much to me. I can only hope, in spite of the burned bridge between us, there may be a way across. I would paddle a little canoe all day and night against wind and tide to get to you again.

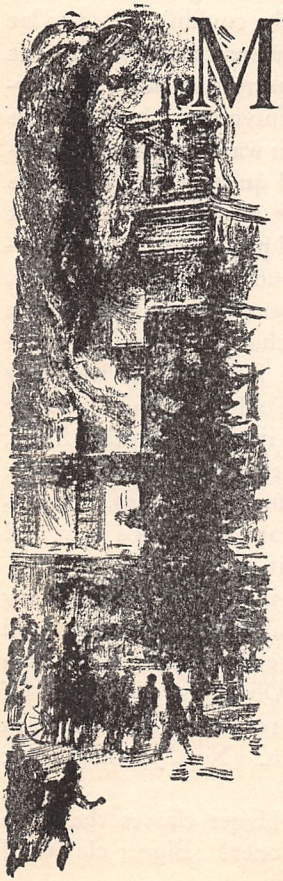
It was Saturday afternoon. Mary knew the old church on the village green would be open. She laid the manuscript back in its wrappers and went down the hill with it under her arm. In the silent place, sweet with roses arranged for the morrow's service, she went to stand for a little before the silver tablet on which were engraved the names of Arthur Rand Fletcher and Eleanor Graham Fletcher, his wife. Presently she lifted the package of manuscript in both hands before the tablet, as one might make an offering before a shrine.

"Oh, do you know?—Do you care?" she whispered.

An hour afterward, back alone in the orchard, the sheets burned to a blackened pile of ashes, Mary stood looking down at them with wet eyes. But she was not unhappy; indeed, her heart was strangely light. She knew, somehow—though she could have given no proof of it beyond her own intense conviction—that they knew and cared.

# CHAPTER XVII

## Out of the Ashes



My dear Professor Fenn:

It gives me great pleasure to state that at a meeting of our College Board, called for the purpose of filling the chair of Psychology made vacant by the death of Prof. Harley Abbott, the presentation of your name met with unanimous approval. We realize that at this late hour you may have been reëngaged for the coming year. But in the circumstances, and in view of the opening of this field of perhaps larger usefulness, we are hoping that your college may generously release you. Permit me to say that I am personally most desirous of seeing you among my colleagues, and trust that you will find it possible to give me an early assurance of your acceptance.

Faithfully yours,

James Sayre Winthrop.
*President.*

It wasn't the first—nor the tenth—time that Mark had read the letter. It lay before him now, open upon his desk, at the hour of midnight. There was no delaying longer, he must decide the question. Late as it was, and weary as he felt—it was the end of the last day of the College

Commencement, and he had been through a long round of the exercises pertaining to the season, in the hottest June weather ever known—he knew that it was due to the senders of the invitation to accept or decline at once.

Harriet had looked wistful, had even cried a little, against her own will, but she had said—"Go." Harriet would say it—she was that sort. It meant everything to her to keep him, yet her honest opinion was that he couldn't afford to let such an opportunity slip. Why, it meant an advancement from a small and obscure place in a narrow world to a recognizable position in a big one. The University whose College of Liberal Arts had called Mark Fenn was one known everywhere, though it might not be placed quite at the top of the list in point of age and renown. It was unthinkable that Harriet should put a straw of personal preference in his way—and she hadn't. Indeed, she was proud and pleased about it, and had pointed out that he might easily procure for her a teaching position in one of the city schools, so that she could still live with him and keep house for him. If the very thought of leaving Newcomb and the old home had made her sick at heart, she bravely suppressed it. On the other hand, something had stirred within her at thought of that change. She was still young enough to long for new scenes, new experiences. Anyhow, she wouldn't stand in Mark's way, and what was to come would come—let it come!

Mark had also laid his letter of invitation before Mary Fletcher. He had had no doubt at all as to what she would say—and she had said it. She had read it through and then had looked up and cried out: "Oh, how splendid! Of course you'll take it. You couldn't refuse. You've been in this little place, buried, long enough. Now you'll get out and *do* something!"

"What can I do—beyond teach bigger classes the same things I've been teaching the small ones? Bigger classes of

the same kind of young men—and perhaps not teach them as well because I can't come into personal contact with so many. It's the personal contact that counts, you know. When I can't remember all the names on my class lists, or recognize half my students when I meet them on the streets, can I do as much for them?"

"Of course you can! If you lost in one way you'd gain in another. There's inspiration in numbers—you'd find it so. What speaker prepares himself as carefully to talk to ten as to a hundred? Besides—you'd be living near a great city; you'd have a thousand stimuli to your mind where you have one here. You'd have that much more to bring to your classes. Why, I shouldn't think you could hesitate an hour, Mark Fenn."

"Yet I have hesitated. It's my father's college—it was a great thing to him to have me teach in it."

"Of course. But would he keep you here, with such a chance for promotion? Never! He wasn't that sort of father."

A smile touched Mark's sober lips. "No, he wasn't that sort of father. But he used to say that the best was none too good for his students, and he always secured the best he could get for the salaries the college could pay. It seems like deserting him—to go."

She looked at him with a quick, searching glance. "But—you want to go?"

He faced her. "Yes, in one way I want very much to go. I'm human, and we all like to go forward. It's impossible not to think of the things you've just mentioned—the interest of facing fifty men to every five I've had here; the attraction of the big city—the libraries, lectures, music, plays—everything. The truth of it is—I'm wild to go—and I want to stay. If you can understand that——"

"I can. But—I beg you to go. I believe it's every man's

duty to make just as much of himself as he can. Your father would say that, I know. And I, as your friend, say it. There's no other answer, Mark."

He had come, more and more, to feel this. Indeed, when he had read the letter for this last time, he had suddenly pulled a sheet of paper toward him and taken out his pen. He might as well get it over. He knew his college would release him, though most regretfully. President Wing had sailed for England two days ago, but he would be the first to bid Mark accept this invitation; indeed, it was more than possible he had already been referred to. He could send a tentative acceptance and then write to Dr. Wing.

Mark pushed the paper away again. One more short walk, up and down the now quiet street, and he would be ready. Best come to his decision and his letter fresh from the open air, not with nerves and brain tired from sitting over a desk. He filled his pipe, took up his hat, and let himself quietly out upon the porch.

What was that faintly ruddy colour in the night sky, above the top of the hill where the college buildings stood? Could the students be having a farewell bonfire? Not likely. All but the graduating class had gone, and even part of those, with the visitors, had taken the evening train. Those left, tired with the many days of exercises and festivities, had gone early to bed, expecting to catch the morning train. After a full week of crowded streets and gala atmosphere, the quiet to-night was restful.

Mark's eyes studied the sky in the north, as he strode rapidly that way. It wasn't much of a colour, hardly enough to attract attention at first; then suddenly it deepened, spread, and became something actual, something to be reckoned with. Mark quickened his pace up the hill; lost the sky behind a line of tall oaks bordering the campus. Out of sight of it his apprehension grew, until as he came out into

a clear space he saw at last that his fears were well grounded —there was a fire, either in the main building of the small group which formed the college, or in the gymnasium directly behind it. He rushed across the campus, shouting loudly.

The dormitories, one on either side, were nearly empty of men; here and there a window showed a white figure, responding to the cry of alarm. Two minutes later people were appearing from all quarters; a few students were running for the college hand fire apparatus. Mark had broken a window and climbed into the office, was telephoning the village fire department. In five minutes bells were clanging as the fire truck plunged heavily up the hill. The main building was on fire at the back and the flames were spreading straight up from the lower floor to the roof. There had been nobody behind to see what was happening; the fire had not shown in front nor in the sky until the whole lower rear floor had been consumed.

Mary Fletcher and Rose O'Grady had wakened at almost the same moment—when the village fire truck came clanging up the hill past the house. They had met in the hall, running to the front of the house, and now hung out of two windows, side by side up under the pillars of the porch.

"It may be the college—it must be!" Mary decided. "There's nothing else up there that could make such a sky. I'm going!"

"You're that. I'm with you. There might be something we could do."

"We must call the Fenns. They mightn't have heard." Mary was hurrying into her clothes. She pinned up her long hanging braids with two hasty thrusts.

"The Professor'll be there before the firemen," Rose called back. "Him that thinks his eyes of the ugly old buildings. We'll waste no time letting him know."

As they ran past the Fenn gate Harriet came flying down the path. "Have you seen Mark?" she cried. "I can't find him."

"Come along. You'll find him in the thick of it." Rose caught her hand. Together the three rushed on up the hill, half the population of the village streaming ahead and behind them.

"Oh—*oh!*" Harriet stood still, panting for breath, half way across the campus. "It's going—the whole main building—the one Father rebuilt. It burned half down once before—he went out and got the money for the new one. Oh, I *wish* I knew where Mark is!"

"He's in that crowd of men, of course," Mary said, with a conviction of tone she didn't feel. "There's nothing they can do." Her own heart was beating hard. There was something awesome, as there always is, about the sight of a big building in the hopeless grip of devastating flames. "Oh, but it's too bad!"

"The bit of stream they've got—it wouldn't be putting out a bonfire." Rose started on again. "There's men up there, too, with the hose."

The three pressed closer. "I *wish* I knew where Mark is!" Harriet kept saying, till Rose turned on her with her own quick thrust to the reasonableness of things.

"You'll not be knowing, Miss Harriet, till the thing's over. You'd not want him standing around keeping himself in a safe place on the edge of trouble. The Professor's no coward—he'll be doing what he can."

"I'm afraid he may try to get out the records—or something," worried Harriet. "Father's records—they were in the office. They'd be the first thing he'd think of. The office was right there in the middle, where it's the worst."

"Would any men have been asleep in that building?" Mary was trying hard to keep cool. It wasn't like Harriet

to be so upset without definite cause, yet it wasn't strange, either. The mere possibility that Mark might be somewhere within reach of those springing, cruel flames was enough to alarm any sister. Even in the case of a neighbour and friend one may be exceedingly anxious.

"Nobody but the janitor and his family. The dormitories are at the sides—over there—and there. But the students have mostly gone, Mark said to-night. These must be townspeople. There's a lot of young men—they aren't doing a thing."

"What could they do—except stand and gaze? They're doing that—bless their little hearts!" Rose glanced at them contemptuously. "It's enjoying themselves they are—they aren't crazy about the college—the town boys. Take your hands out of your pockets, you gossoon!"

"Where'll I put 'em?" questioned the youth, passing Rose and catching her last words. He whirled on his heel and looked laughing into her face, ruddy in the firelight. Every riotous Irish red curl on her head was standing out; she had merely caught them up into a mop at the back; she looked every inch a saucy girl of his own age.

"Is the janitor out—and his family?" she came back at him.

"Why, of course—suppose so."

"Why not know so? It takes hands to get folks out—and things. There might be a statue of a lazy man you could be carrying out, sonny. Or a book on 'What To Do When Things Happen.'"

Before he could retort she had turned her back on him. "I've stood here as long as I can," she announced. "I'm off to see what's happening—close up. You'd best stay here—you weren't in the army like me. Maybe somebody'll be needing a nurse." And without further words she ran around the offending group of village young men with their

hands also in their pockets, and was lost to view in the crowd beyond.

"Oh, let's go too!" urged Mary. But Harriet held her back.

"We'll only be in the way. Rose might really help. And maybe she'll find Mark.—*Oh—look at that!*"

It was the first crumbling of an upper turret which an instant later crashed in with a great flare of leaping flame, followed by a smother of smoke which rolled low across the campus.

"They're doing as well's they can," said a man close beside Mary, "but the water supply ain't good enough up here. Pressure's low in dry times. They can't handle that fire with what they've got. Building's bound to go—all of it."

"She burned once before—fifteen years or so ago," another man commented. "Same trouble—they couldn't get a stream on her. Hill's no place for an institution, *I* say, without an expensive water-pumping system—which they ain't got. Guess they'd better locate elsewhere if they want to keep goin'."

On their other side Mary and Rose heard other critics. These were village women.

"President Wing sailed day before yesterday, didn't he? Guess he'll wish he hadn't when he gets the news."

"What'd he want to go off for before Commencement was over?"

"Something about taking a degree at Oxford, I heard. Better'd have let the degree go and looked after his college. He always did travel around a lot, *I* thought."

"Mrs. Wing go with him?"

"Sure, she did. Always goes when he does, summers."

"Wonder when they'll get the news."

"Wireless'll catch 'em," the woman said, importantly. "But much good that'll do—they can't get back till they've been across."

"Come!" Mary breathed. "We must do something besides stand here. Let's try to get around on the back side of the building—perhaps we can find something to do."

But the crowd was denser at the back of the burning building where the fire engine stood. They couldn't approach nearer than a small hillock at the side of the gymnasium, but from this point certain active forms other than those of firemen became visible. At the end of the building farthest from the centre of destruction, which the flames hadn't yet reached, but toward which, in spite of all efforts, they were rapidly extending, men were rushing out from the windows piles of books, which others were carrying into the gymnasium itself.

"They're trying to save the library," Harriet cried, excitedly. "Oh, what a pity!—Mark will be wild about losing all those books. They can never get them all out in time."

"Why didn't they have a separate library building?"

"Mercy!—this is a small college, Mary—they could never afford it. But it's a splendid collection. Oh—look!—it's breaking out 'way down at that end!"

"There's Professor Chilton." Mary leaned forward as a tall figure with smoke-begrimed face and eyes red-rimmed with smoke staggered toward the gymnasium heavily loaded. "And there's Mr. Somers—and Mr. Hamilton."

"Oh, the whole faculty are here, of course. I *wish* I could see Mark! I'm going to push through there and ask somebody if they've seen him."

But she didn't get far. At the moment there was a tremendous crash, as the entire middle portion of the roof fell into the blazing furnace of the interior, and there was a falling back of the crowd which carried Harriet and Mary with it as if they had been straws.

"Get back, everybody!" shouted a voice of authority. "The walls may go down any minute. Get back—farther—and keep back—'way back—everybody!"

"That's Mark!" Sister and friend spoke the relieved words together.

"He sounds unhurt," whispered Mary, smiling into Harriet's tense face.

"I see him." Harriet strained her eyes to peer through the uncanny, smoky-orange light. "I've been watching those men on the roof—I thought he might be there. I *wish* they'd come down."

"Firemen know when to come. There—they're coming now—down that ladder. It's no use—they can't save a bit of it."

They couldn't. It had been apparent from the first, yet they had done all they could. In spite of the usual amount of traditional enmity between "town and gown," the village really was enormously proud of its college, and the burning of the central and most important building would be considered a calamity affecting the whole community. The village firemen had worked savagely and with every expedient to overcome the obstacle of the low water pressure. Chemicals had been used without stint. Mark himself had been first in the building to tear down the various containers from the walls and hurl them into the centre of the blaze. A small engine, privately owned and operated by one of the rich young men of the town, had also done its best. Had the fire been discovered a few minutes earlier, such resources might have been sufficient.

"I know what we can do," Mary said suddenly. "Let's get word to Mark to bring the firemen and the faculty—everybody that's done any work—and we'll have coffee for them, on my porch. It'll be over in an hour more—and there's no wind, the other buildings will be safe. They've worked like fiends—they'll need it."

"Splendid!" The idea of action was a relief; Harriet could rejoice at the thought, unhappy as she was over that

which was to her and Mark the destruction of what was all but personal property.

The two made their way around the outskirts of the crowd and hurried back to the house. Two hours later the Graham porch was the centre of fresh activities. Grimy hands seized Mary's steaming cups, and dipped into great pans of doughnuts, made in haste by Eliza. In the two hours leeway she had turned out an incredible number, stimulated by thought of the hungry men who would enjoy them.

"There's nothing else that goes so good with coffee, Miss Mary," she had said, when Mary proposed sandwiches. "I made ninety-five doughnuts once in half an hour, when my father's barn burned. I guess nobody ever beat that, if I do say it. It most broke my heart, though, because I couldn't make a hundred. My little brother was watching the clock on me, and that got me nervous. I won't get nervous tonight because I ain't so much connected with the college, as you might say—though I do think a lot of Miss Harriet and Mr. Mark." And by the way she plunged into her self-appointed task, even while her tongue ran excitedly, Mary knew Eliza's hands would work with skill and rapidity.

"This is great stuff, Miss Fletcher," declared Edgar Hamilton, the young instructor in chemistry who had by no means failed to follow up his acquaintance with Mary, begun at Harriet's dinner, last September. He began on his third doughnut as he spoke, and Mary handed the big pan on to a stalwart fireman who looked as if he had worked even harder than Mr. Hamilton. "It's almost worth having the old building burn for. Pretty antiquated, I thought it. I hope they'll get a new one—though I hardly think I'll stay to see. My laboratory was wiped out like a drawing on a slate."

"Guess this'll put the kibosh on the college for next year, won't it?" speculated the fireman at his elbow. "There don't look like much left, with the main building gone, so."

"Oh, I suppose things can go on, somehow, housing classes about the town, as is usually done in such cases," Hamilton explained, in his condescending manner which lost a little from conjunction with his very dirty face. To do him justice he had done his best to save his most expensive chemicals, and had succeeded sufficiently to make him feel that he had played his part with honour. "But it's a blow to the institution it'll be hard to recover from. It wouldn't be possible to have a new building under another year—and I don't know where the funds for it would come from, if it were," he continued to Mary. "Somebody'll have to do some pretty stiff work before they have enough, these days of costly materials and labour."

"You speak as if you were already out of it," Mary commented, with a touch of criticism in her voice which brought Hamilton to modify in haste his attitude of aloofness.

"Oh, I'm interested, of course. But I've only been here a year, and couldn't be expected to take it to heart like some of the old timers—Fenn, for instance. One would have said he had a wife and large family of children in the building, by the way he tore around. Now, in a way, I consider a fire like that a blessing. When they do get a new building it'll be up-to-date—I hope—which the old one certainly wasn't."

"An old building has its charm, however, Mr. Hamilton, hasn't it?" inquired mildly the pleasant voice of Professor Chilton. The tall figure of the Englishman loomed up at Mary's other side, as she was about to turn away, and she paused to listen. "Up-to-dateness" in scholastic housing was hardly likely to be an Oxford man's first requirement. "One must consider the loss of ivy-covered walls a very real one. The traditions which come down from father to son must suffer more or less destruction at such a time."

He had been among the hardest of the workers, and his

appearance bore testimony to that fact. He was in his begrimed shirt-sleeves, one of which was badly torn; his hair, which grew in such a way as to leave two scholarly peaks at either side of his forehead, was dishevelled; his eyes were smoke-reddened and suffused.

"Oh, yes, indeed," Hamilton admitted, with the respectful inflection Chilton invariably called out, "the old building had a certain dignity, in spite of its general look of decay. In a way, I'm sorry it's gone. But I'm sorrier about the equipment, which was really pretty good."

"It was admirable. In your own department, Mr. Hamilton, I have understood that there was little you lacked —and you did well to try to save as much as possible. As for the library—I was amazed, when I first came, at its extent and quality; no college need be ashamed of such a collection. I am happy that so many volumes were rescued. Mr. Fenn deserves great praise for the system of salvage he put into execution. I fear he may have suffered some injury, however. Have you seen him since he came down?"

"I haven't, for a fact. The last I saw of him, though, he was all right. Burned his hands a little, but nothing more. Most of us did something of the kind." Hamilton exhibited a cut finger bound with a strip of handkerchief. "Had to smash a window in the lab," he explained.

Mary went on with her serving, but her eyes searched the crowd for Mark. She hadn't seen Rose since she left her at the fire, and had herself been too busy to miss her. Harriet had reported Mark safe and sound, having had a message from him that he would stay a while longer on the ground to make sure all was safe. But Mary was beginning to wish very much that he would appear, when she caught sight of him, coming with Rose across the lawn from his own home. His right arm was in a sling, and his face was a scorched and cindery red, but he came with a vigorous stride, with which

Rose had some difficulty to keep up. Mary went to meet the pair.

"Broken?"

"Not a bit. Merely singed—and Miss O'Grady would put her mark on it."

"It's burned to the deep tissue," said Rose, "and him rarin' about the place and gettin' dirt in it. It's in bed he should be, this minute, but he's got something on his mind again, and I can do nothing with him."

She looked after him, for he hadn't lingered to be condoled with. "There goes a regular fellow," said she. "Not in the army have I seen such a dare-devil—and me thinking him all books and no brawn. It was books he was lifting by the ton, after he was burned, but it wasn't for books he risked his life. It was for a couple of old tin boxes and a bundle of papers he got out of the middle of the building after it was all afire. They may have been important, but they weren't worth his life. Still, I'm glad he got them," she concluded, with a twinkle in her Irish eyes, "for I judge he couldn't have lived without them anyways. He put them to bed in his desk before he'd have his arm dressed, and me waiting with the bandages.—What have you got over here? Coffee? Faith, will you hand me a quart of that same? That was right clever of you to think of it—the men need it."

She needed it herself, Mary saw. Rose drank thirstily and smiled at Eliza, bringing a plateful of doughnuts.

"Your wings, Eliza," she murmured, "look to me bigger and whiter than ever, and that's saying something."

"These are the last, Miss Rose. I've fried a hundred and sixty-three, and the flour and lard's given out—and I guess the men are full. These are for you and Mr. Fenn. I saw you coming—and him with his arm hurt. Where is he?"

"Bless my heart, the man's going to make a speech! Let me get where I can see him." And Rose, her hands full,

hastily moved nearer the spot where Mark stood, calling to a departing group of men at the edge of the lawn:

"Come back, please. I want to say something to everybody!"

They gathered around, students, men of the faculty, townsmen, a motley little crowd, among whom, in the lights which came from the house windows, it would have been difficult for a discerning eye to distinguish the professor of mathematics from one of the village plumbers, or a member of the graduating class with his diploma in his packed trunk from the young postman who stood beside him. All looked alike of the common people, who had been to a fire and seen as much service there as their varying personal qualities had inspired them to offer.

All now regarded with interest the figure of Mark Fenn, in his soiled and burned shirt-sleeves, with his arm in a sling, as he stood at the edge of the porch and began a short speech. If his words remained indelibly impressed upon the memories of certain of those who listened, it was because they came with a tensity and force which were bound to command attention. It was undoubtedly the hour and the place and the man together, and when that conjunction occurs there is no need of record by pen and paper. Years afterward, Mary Fletcher thought she could have repeated that speech, word for word.

"Boys, our biggest building's gone. It's a terrific loss; we haven't an hour to mourn about it. The President's away —he can't get back under a month, and we can't wait for him to come and take charge. I've been all over the ruins, and I believe there's a lot of material left. The first thing to be done is to clear away the débris, and it'll take time to get workmen here. Labour's high. We here can do it ourselves. We *must* have a new building well under way by fall; we must have the news of it go out at once, so not a boy

will change his mind about registering here for next term. You'll say—you can't help saying—where's the money coming from? That's what I want to tell you. I'm going out to get it—*starting to-morrow morning.* I shall spend the summer at it. If I can tell the people I go to that everybody's already at work here, hard and fast, that will make them realize we mean to do our part. I'm calling for volunteers—and there are two men from the engineering department I want to have sign up first. Under their direction"—and he looked down into two eager faces below him at his left—"that débris can be cleaned up with mighty little expense. How about it—Collins and Underwood?"

"Here, sir," responded Collins, and Underwood was but a breath behind him. Both were beaming approval.

"I know what that means," Mark asserted, "for I know something of their plans. Now, men of the faculty, nobody's authorized me to do this thing, but I'm going to do it just the same. I want your help. How many of you will stay in town this summer and put things through?"

There was a moment's silence. Somers, the mathematics head, spoke.

"Excuse me, Fenn, but I can't help doubting the wisdom of this. With President Wing away, have we the right to take things into our own hands? The times are difficult—raising the money won't be easy. Personally I'm ready to do my part, of course. But the cost of materials is very high, and it seems to me it might be for our advantage to defer building until another year, when prices may be lower. Rushing it through this summer——"

Here murmurs right and left interrupted him, and for a minute or two discussion became general and excited. Both sides were strenuously upheld. Mark allowed the talk to continue long enough to satisfy the need for expression, then he called out again, asking for another hearing. And now

he spoke in a different tone. He had taken them by storm with the practical side of the matter, because he had felt it necessary to startle them before he tried to persuade them, to get their attention. The hour was late—it was indeed nearly morning, and though the coffee had somewhat refreshed them they were weary. In a way he knew it was no time to enlist them on his side, and yet—he felt it his only chance. When these men had returned to their homes and their wives, and had begun to discuss the matter over breakfast tables, those summer plans most of them had made would appear more alluring than ever. Besides, one or two of the faculty were expecting to leave within a day or two, not to mention all these of the graduating class who had not already gone. He must capture their wills to-night, or fail.

"Men of Newcomb," he said—and the change in his tone arrested them all, for he was no longer speaking to the crowd in general, but to his colleagues in the faculty, whose support he must have—"in a biography of a distinguished educator, there occurs this phrase, which has burned itself into my memory—'*The power of a great and challenging expectation.*' It has come to me with tremendous force to-night that we have in our hands an extraordinary opportunity. Newcomb is a small college and is known—where it is known—as such. If we can do the big thing of creating a '*challenging expectation*' in the minds of our public by pushing through this rebuilding in one summer season, we shall do more to bring new boys here than we have ever done. If we can make them feel the spirit of the place—the big, indomitable spirit which you and I know really exists here—they will flock to us—nothing can keep them away. The thing can be done, I know it can. It means self-sacrifice. I put it up to you—for the sake of Newcomb, and of William Wescott Wing, will you stand by me and see it through?"

He had barely paused when the Englishman from Oxford,

whose homeward passage on a ship sailing two days later had long been booked, the newest comer of them all except Edgar Hamilton, spoke quietly from the shadow of the tall white pillar near by.

"If you will permit me, I will accompany you, Mr. Fenn, on your trip to raise the funds."

After that there was but one thing for all of them to do —to agree. As Mary watched the faces in the light upon the lawn, she was almost startled by their transformed expression. Mark's simple yet magnetic words had struck the spark of loyalty. These American college men couldn't allow themselves to be outdone by one from across the water, whose name was better known than any of their own. As they dispersed they were talking earnestly, college men and townsmen alike, of the thing that was to be done. There could be no doubt that Mark's work was well begun.

As the lawn cleared Mary came up to Mark. He had rather suddenly backed up from the edge of the porch to lean against the wall of the house, as if with the end of the necessity for endurance, fatigue and pain were all at once in the ascendency. But his smile at her was very bright.

"You look as if you were worn out—and yet quite happy. Can you possibly be both ?" she asked.

"Both—easily."

"But you haven't given up the new offer? You'll do what you can this summer, and then go in the fall?"

He looked at her steadily. "No—I've decided to stand by the old college—and my father," he said.

For a moment she studied him. "Is *standing by* your motto?"

"I didn't know it, if it is."

"And haven't you really any ambition to get away into a bigger life?"

"I can think of no bigger life than Newcomb now offers.

If I can help seize this chance to bring new life to this college —as I'm sure can be done—won't that be a more 'challenging expectation' for *me*, than merely bettering my salary and the size of my classes? Anyhow, it's settled. I'm sorry if you're disappointed."

A little smile touched her face and he saw it suddenly glowing with a look he hadn't expected.

"I want you to know," she said, "that never in my life have I been so proud of a friend. And everything I can find to do to help you I'm going to do. It may be more than you would think."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Partnership

"BOY with proof, Miss Mary. Says it's got to go right back, if you want the letters ready to go out to-night."

"Yes, Eliza—thank you. Tell him I'll have it ready in ten minutes."

Mary received the two slim galleys, picked up a pencil and with a trained eye ran rapidly through them. She sat at a fine old desk in a small room beyond the drawing-room which had taken on the business-like look of an office. Herself trim and fresh in blue linen, she had very much the air of a woman of affairs. She drew quick lines and signs, here and there; wrote in a brief paragraph and expunged another; ran over the whole once more and took it out herself to the waiting boy.

"Tell Mr. Simmons to send it up by four, if it's a possible thing. Bring it yourself, won't you, Kim?—Then you'll know it's done."

"You bet I will, Miss Fletcher." The answer held a note of pride. After this method accompanied by a smile and nod, as of confidence, was Mary accustomed to annex her henchmen.

She turned back to her desk. Beside it Harriet Fenn sat addressing envelopes—stiff, correct, square envelopes, calculated to impress the recipients favourably. Harriet's handwriting was distinctive—firm and clearly black; just the sort to go with the envelopes.

"The letter reads pretty well," Mary said, with gay assurance. "I didn't know how well till I saw it set up. I never produced any short story that gave me more satisfaction. If it doesn't bring results then I've lost my grip on English. But it's going to go right into their hearts and their pockets—or I'll change my profession."

Three hours later Harriet, reading the top sheet of the great pile that had come from the printer's, drew a long sigh of wonder.

"Mary, how did you do it? That's the most irresistible appeal I ever read. We have circular letters from schools and colleges coming in every week, and most of them go into the waste-basket. But nobody could put this there—not after the first glance."

"Will they give it the first glance, Harry? Yes, I think they will. It's too stunning a make-up not to get that slantwise look which will arrest it on the way to the waste-basket, and if they read as far as the third paragraph they're gone. The whole thing is cumulative—if I know the meaning of the word. Excuse my conceit, but big things aren't done without a certain amount of confidence and cockyness in the doers."

"Be as cocky as you like, Mary. If you do this thing we'll bless you forever. And I'm almost beginning to believe you will, tremendous as it looks to me."

"It's not tremendous at all. A thousand seats at a hundred dollars a seat is only modest modern method. The old graduate who won't give up a hundred dollars for his college in trouble isn't worthy the name. As for the music, the pageant, and the play we're putting on for him, if they're not

worth coming for they're not worth anything. I'm going absolutely crazy over that, and so will you, when we give you a chance to hear what Guy and I've worked out. Listen to this—it's Guy's latest idea for one of the songs, in the first and jolliest act, before things grow serious."

She sprang up and across the hall to the drawing-room. Harriet followed, to stand listening in delight to the march and swing of the chorus that Mary dashed off the keyboard, and to watch, as she was always doing in wonder, the captivating sparkle of Mary's personality when she was in the mood. With the last notes Dr. Christopher Reade's voice was heard calling in at the French window:

"What's that, in Terpsichore's name? I tried to get by but couldn't. I thought I was tired but decide I'm not—while I'm hearing that."

Mary swung round upon the bench. "Pretty snappy? That comes in the first act—male octette just off the football field. Guy's caught the spirit right off the gridiron, hasn't he? That song will be roared all over the country, next fall."

Dr. Reade came over to her, regarding her intently.

"This isn't hurting you a bit, that I can see," he admitted. "One trace of nervous fatigue, and I should put on the brakes. You're actually thriving on hard work."

"I'm glad you admit it. And it's the best fun I've had in years. Did you go by the campus this morning?"

"I did—and was tempted to get out and put my shoulder under, just to have a share. Things certainly are moving."

They were moving everywhere. It was the last of August, and in the ten weeks since the fire wonders had been accomplished. A faculty on its mettle, a large group of students—all who lived within a radius of many miles and considerably many more from a farther distance—a townspeople becoming daily more and more interested, were doing the work of at

least a hundred workmen. Material was coming in daily, and the new building was beginning to show definite outlines of construction. The architect had been summoned from the ranks of the graduates, and had executed his drawings in hot haste, alive to his chance to show what could be done by a man with vision and resource. The contractor was a Newcomb citizen, very proud of his appointment. The two young engineers whom Mark's discernment had picked for the task of organizing the unskilled labour offered by the students had proved to be steam engines for work, and had thrown themselves into their task as only those can who have their spurs to win and an unusual chance in which to win them.

Of course there had been obstacles, delays, all the usual happenings attendant upon such undertakings. Some of the faculty had been dissatisfied with the architect's plans, criticizing them as too ambitious. The architect, Wilfred Barton, backed by Mark and Chilton, had had to use every argument to convince certain of the opposers that this was the time to build for the future. The long, low building proposed, of college Gothic style, with its central archway leading to what would sometime be an ivied quadrangle, after the English manner, seemed to certain practical men the idealistic aping of a form not suited to the more modern atmosphere of the younger country. They hadn't hesitated to say so.

"Why not? Must energy express itself in skyscrapers? We've all the space we need to expand in; why not have long, broad lines instead of chimney-stack ones? We don't want to look like a cotton mill, nor a motor factory!"

Mark had had his way. After all, it was he upon whom the mantle of his father had descended. The son of a man who had had the courage to rebuild fifteen years ago, when

the resources of the college were far smaller than now, held certain definite rights by virtue of his assuming this renewed burden. Also, Mark Fenn had the confidence of his associates, both in the college and the town. He was known, not as a visionary, but as level-headed in all matters of practical importance. And there was no doubt but that the architect's plans, as submitted and exhibited in a prominent down-town window, were of a beauty and dignity to impress all imaginations except those whose one principle seemed to be that utility must be ugly.

It was a busy summer. Mary Fletcher's campaign took on large proportions as her ideas expanded. The replies to the first letters she had sent out came in gratifyingly, and by the first of August she had sold more than half of her hundred-dollar seats in the amphitheatre to be erected on the campus. By the end of the month only two score remained. As a publicity expert she knew no limits. Cartoons, posters, columns in newspapers, even a magazine article with photographic illustrations, were achieved by her hand. Every particle of her skill in writing, every ounce of her new energy, she threw into the scale against the general apathy of an uninterested public at large.

Early in August John Kirkwood had written to ask if he might take two seats in the front rows, and added:

Why haven't you told me about it? Only by chance did I come upon your magazine article. It's corking. I'm amazed and delighted. Can't I help? How about a row of thousand-dollar boxes? I believe you could swing them—fifty of them, at least, and add that much more to your exchequer. Mayn't I come up and see the good work in action, right now? I might have some other workable suggestion for you, if you don't think the boxes practical.

Mary had written back:

You may come for the fête—not before, please. But I don't want to try the thousand-dollar boxes, though that idea does appeal

gorgeously to the imagination. I shouldn't want it to fail—and we're certain of the audience on the lower basis. Thank you for your interest—and I'm delighted to reserve seats 11 and 12, row G for you. You'll be in good company. The President and Mrs. Wing will be next you on the right.

With this he had to be content, but he employed himself with helping to spread the publicity in his own immediate neighbourhood. Presently he sent her in orders for ten more tickets, for which she avowed herself duly grateful. As a reward she sent him a photograph of the campus in its present state of activity, which he searched vainly for a hint of her own figure.

One early September evening, at a small railway junction not far from Newcomb, Mary was pacing up and down, looking up at the summer-night stars, when the train going in the opposite direction to the one she awaited drew in. Only a few passengers alighted, and she was abstractedly observing the uninteresting outlines of those in advance when a figure of a different character detached itself from the rest and came rapidly toward her. The light from the station windows was full upon her face, and now fell upon that of the traveller approaching. She could see Mark's smile break out vividly as he neared her. She took an eager step to meet him, and their right hands met in a strong clasp.

"What unbelievable luck!" He was gazing into her face.

"Isn't it? And I've just learned my train is twenty minutes late." She wasn't trying at all to hide her pleasure. Why shouldn't they be glad to meet? There was so much to tell each other.

"If it hadn't been I'd have found a way to delay it, if I'd had to flag it down the line myself. Well!—Is it really you? Last time I rounded up at Newcomb you were off on Heaven

knew what aggressive feature of your campaign. Is it another that takes you now? Mary, I've just seen the article in *The Olympus*. It's a winner!"

"Is it? Time will show. And the last seats are filling fast now. How does it go with you? Any new big subscriptions?"

He ran his hand across his forehead, pushing back the chestnut locks; his hat was still in his hand. "Two—but not as many of late as I want—and need. August's been a bad time for seeing men. Many were off on vacation, and those who weren't were tired and irritable. But the thing's going forward—it's got to go."

"I believe you're tired yourself." She scanned his face more closely, while he smiled back at her, trying to let the lines of fatigue relax.

"It's been abominably hot—as you know. You're probably tired yourself, though you surely don't look it. Mary, how is it you keep so fresh and flexible? You're working as hard as I—harder, if the truth were known."

"Not a bit of it. I'm having the experience of my life. I never was so interested—absorbed. And you know I've not only the business end of my plans to look after, there's the pageant—and the musical play. Guy's doing such glorious work, it keeps me inspired. We're pushing along on the last act, now—the thing is mounting, mounting, to its climax. I'm so thrilled with it I go to sleep every night with one of his songs in my brain."

"Tell me about it. Can't we find a place to sit?" He looked about him. The box of a station was shadowy, except where the light poured from the window of the agent, whence a fitful clicking of a telegraph key broke the quiet. The passengers had already scattered, except for one who paced at the farther end of the platform. Far in the distance could be heard the faint rumble of the receding train. A rod

or two down the line stood a pile of railway ties. Mark led the way toward this unconventional resting place.

"Wouldn't you rather hear first where I'm going to-night? I'm so proud of this latest idea."

"Tell me that, then. Anything, so that I hear you speak. It seems a year since I heard the sound of your voice!"

"Why, Mark!" She was smiling. "I believe you're homesick."

"That may be it. Whatever it is, it's medicine for my nostalgia to meet you here. If I'd reached Newcomb again to find you gone I'd have been—unhappy. I've so much to tell you—and so much to hear. Well—where are you going? And will you be back before to-morrow night?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm going to Stevenson and the old school. I'm going to tell my story to the boys. For my father's sake and mine they'll be interested in David Matthew Fenn, his friend, and in Mark Fenn, my friend, and in Newcomb. They're a rich and generous young group. I think they'll take ten tickets, at least. If they don't—I've lost my powers of persuasion."

"You're not speaking there this evening?" He glanced at his watch—it was half-past nine.

"I was to have spoken at the close of a concert, but unless it's prolonged my late train won't get me there in time. I should have taken the morning train, but was too busy. You see we have rehearsal every morning now."

"Since you're to be too late, you'd better go back with me. Then you'll be present at to-morrow morning's rehearsal."

"Oh, no—I wish I could. But I've wired from here, and they're expecting me. Indeed, they proposed to send a motor over, but the train will make it sooner. I imagine I shall get my speech in this evening."

"I wish I could hear it. Why can't I? It would be a new experience—to hear you, in such a place."

"Come along. I'll be delighted to have you—if you're not too tired."

Had he been so weary? His sense of fatigue, already forgotten, vanished completely under this stimulus. The remaining time passed all too fast, and the incoming train was boarded by two people who looked as if they were setting out on a happy adventure.

At Stevenson, reached quickly enough once the train was off, they were met and rushed in the twinkling of an eye to a classic-looking building covered with ivy, ablaze with lights, from whose windows came sounds of music. Inside, three hundred youths gave Mary Fletcher a spontaneous and thunderous round of applause the moment she appeared with the headmaster, while a smiling faculty greeted her with warmth. Most of the house-masters and instructors had been there in her father's day, and those who had not knew Mary by the traditions. All her infancy and girlhood had been spent here; there were many stories now current of the days when to secure a dance with Dr. Fletcher's vivaciously lovely daughter had been the most coveted prize in a chaperon's gift. As the present incumbents looked at her now in her rich and still youthful maturity, they could easily believe any tales of her popularity.

Standing at the back of the hall, according to his desire, having refused to take a more prominent place, Mark now received a totally new impression of Mary. Versatile as she was, he hadn't imagined just how wonderfully she could do this thing she had set herself to do. He had known, of course, that she would make a charming speech, and that her personality would easily influence, even coerce, the school's student body as if it had been one susceptible boyish mind and heart. But what he hadn't realized was the effect the sight and hearing of her was to have upon himself; how utterly she was to capture and hold him, as if he too had been a lad of

sixteen with every tendril of his growing nature ready to reach out and grasp at her. Yet it was to his best judgment as well as to his sensibilities that she appealed; the quality of her—the high, fine attributes of her mind and spirit as well as the magnetism of her face and voice, the whole distinguished, beautiful presence of her as she stood there speaking—it was all Mark could do to keep himself in hand. He wanted to take her away from them all and tell her just what she had become.

There was a rush at her when she had done. For half an hour she stood at the end of the long room while the boys filed by her, shaking her hand, saying, "One seat, please, Miss Fletcher,"—or "I'm going to write my father about this; I think he'll want to subscribe." Several of the richer boys of the school said in low voices, and with an evident effort not to swagger: "I'll take two seats." And one young nabob whispered: "Two seats—and I'll pay a thousand for 'em if you'll make 'em on the front row. *That's* what I think of your speech, Miss Fletcher."

Altogether, when Mary's eyes met Mark's once more, as she rejoined him, they were full of a joyful triumph—but of more than that. He had little chance to talk with her. He was taking his train back to Newcomb at midnight, and she was going on in the morning to another engagement, this time with a girl's school. But there was a moment or two, and he made the most of it.

"I've always known," he said, "that the greatest thing I could do for any pupil of mine was to enlarge and enrich his chance at sometime possessing a personality with which to accomplish his life. But I never knew as I do now just what Heaven and your parents and teachers gave you. And how it has grown, Mary! What things you can do with it. You look to me to-night like one with a tremendous force in her grasp—the force of *herself*. I congratulate you—and envy

you—and—am wonderfully happy about you. I'm as proud of you as if I'd made you, myself."

"I suppose you don't know that you've done your share," she answered, quite simply, but with a sudden deepening of the content in her eyes which the success of her effort had brought there.

"I wish I thought so. I've done little, I fear, but look on at the development. It's been an interesting thing to watch. And to-night I saw its full flower."

"It wasn't much of a speech. I just—talked to them, as I would to my young brother if I'd had one."

"You just talked to them. And all the while you were giving out the very essence of yourself—filling their cups of interest and adoration till they spilled over in response. They're not giving to Newcomb, Mary—they're giving to you!"

"No—you're wrong. They're giving to the memory of my father, because he was your father's friend and would have stood by him in this crisis."

He shook his head. "They're giving to you. Just as I, as I go on about my work of getting my funds, will be giving —after to-night—not so much to Newcomb or even to my father's memory—as to you. Because you've gone into partnership with me in this thing, and the paramount interest has become—since I heard you speak to-night—to pull it through *with you!* It's put heart and courage into me—given me the sense of being doubly strong. You've given me the very most subtle and beautiful thing in human friendship to-night, Mary—whether you know it or not: a sort of transfusion of the blood of all virility—the thing the gods drink of and then do godlike acts."

She could only look at him in amazement. They had been taken into some secretary's office to wait while somebody attended to other guests and then came back for them, to take

Mark to his train and Mary to a hostess who was expecting her. For the moment they were still alone and the sounds of the departing audience had died down to silence.

He smiled back at her, but his eyes were deep with feeling.

"I know," he said. "You hardly recognize the staid Mark in such a speech. You almost think I've lost my head. You see," he went on rapidly, "I was so tired and discouraged tonight when I met you at the station, I felt like giving it all up. The day had been full of disappointments—I'd no time to tell you. Of course I shouldn't have given up—never—it's not in me to do that. But I was discovering the need of some elixir of life—to help me pull the terrific load I'd taken upon myself. Well—I've had it—drunk deep of it. I can do anything now, I think!"

"Do you mean—*I* gave you that?"

"You. Nobody but you. And nobody but you *could* have given it to me."

The colour poured into her face, making it so warmly vivid that she felt the impulse to put up her hands for an instant to cover it, like a child. But it was with all a woman's self-control that she met this strange new look of his which accompanied this strange new thing he had said.

"If that is true," she answered slowly, "I've only paid something of the debt I owe you. It's what you've been giving me, all along. Only I never knew it—till—just a little while ago."

They stood looking into each others' eyes for a moment, as if in wonder at the recognition of mutual bestowment which had taken place. And then the too-brief interview was over; others came; they were piloted to the place where the waiting motor was to take Mark to his train.

As Mary, crossing the velvety turf of the lawn which lay between the hall of the evening's affairs and the home of the headmaster, where she was to be entertained, looked back

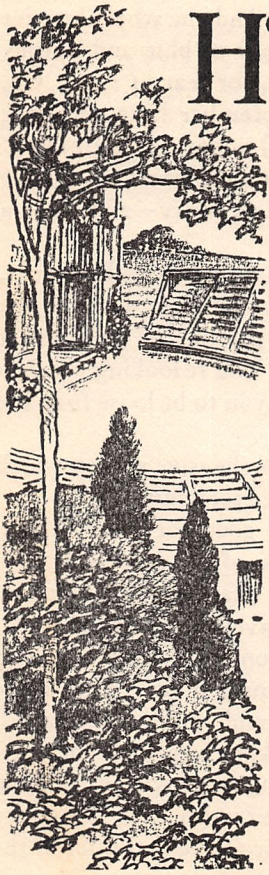
at the lights of Mark's car disappearing down the road, her companion, Dr. Simonds, the head himself, spoke words to which her ears listened eagerly.

"That was a particularly interesting man, your friend, Professor Fenn. I shall hope to see him again. I had only a word with him, but in our short talk his quality showed very plainly. Curious, isn't it, Miss Fletcher, this matter of personality? A look, a bearing, half a dozen sentences exchanged—and the thing is done. One has an impression as swift and distinct—sometimes as permanent—as the registering of the sun upon the sensitive plate of the camera. A moment's contact—and I want to see the man again—know that I should like him—feel that I should believe in him. I'm glad you brought him."

"I'm glad too," said Mary to herself. "Oh, how glad I am!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### Blue and Purple



"HOW very, very interesting—and original! What a conception! Is it yours, Mary? Of course it must be."

"You do me great honour, Sandy. But it isn't mine, except in the vaguest form imaginable. It's Perry Gilfillan who has worked it out. It *is* pretty fine, isn't it? Oh, I'm so glad you could be here. It needed you to make the whole thing perfect for me, you know."

Alexandra Warren, prepossessingly trim and tailored, had been brought by Mary straight from the train to the college campus, to view the active preparations for the event which was now only two days off. The two stood looking toward a scene in which many workmen were engaged—workmen who were palpably of the student class, and whose looks were as eager as their voices. Seats for the thousand patrons of Mary's bidding had been prepared in amphitheatre form looking toward the great stage formed by the foundation and flooring of the long building in process of erection.

Its walls at back and side had risen to the height of one story, but the front had been left open, with only the steel construction pillars showing, and these had been garlanded out of sight with ropes of evergreeen. Shrubbery had been temporarily planted to screen and soften the foundation stone, and a picturesque enclosure for an orchestra had been arranged.

"All that's rough and unsightly is to be hidden with masses of green," Mary explained. "And the whole interior is to be hung with a wonderful drapery of blue and purple. That can't go up till the last minute, for fear of rain. Oh, pray, Sandy, just *pray* that this September heat and haze may last three days longer. It's ideal to-day—it *must* last!"

"I think it will. It's the season for such weather—you've probably chosen wisely. What a stage, Mary—and what a setting all around!"

"Yes, isn't it perfect? But we mustn't stay to look at it. I've a rehearsal in fifteen minutes—we must go down to the house, where I'll give you time to get out of your smart travellies and into something cooler. You're looking wonderfully well, Sandy. It's been good for you to be loose from me for so long."

The two gave each other that comprehensive survey which two friends may exchange, smiling yet searching.

"It certainly seems to have been good for you. Mary, you've—the only word I can think of to express it is—bloomed! I never imagined such a change. And with all this work on your shoulders—how have you managed it?"

"It's sweet Rosie O'Grady, of whom I've written you so many pages. She makes me keep myself fit. That's the whole story. Wait till you meet her and you'll understand."

They went down to the house talking busily all the way. The big guest-room above the drawing-room was in its usual peaceful order, but it seemed to Alexandra that the entire remainder of the house was given over to the activities of the

approaching festival. People were constantly coming and going. From the drawing-room rose the sound of musical voices—solos, duets—a male chorus, accompanied by several instruments. On the rear porch a group of girls and women were sewing on masses of purple and blue cloth—the draperies of which Mary had spoken.

"I'm most anxious for you to know my young composer," Mary had said. When Alexandra came down in her kilted green-and-white skirt and green sweater, her small green silk hat pulled well over her smooth hair, Mary gave a little cry of pleasure and led her toward the drawing-room.

"The rehearsal's over, and you'll be a refreshing sight for Guy's eyes. He's crazy over those jade greens worn so much now; the boy's developed a splendid colour sense along with his other creative instincts. It was he who insisted on the blue and purple for our backgrounds—says he's been hearing blue and purple all through his composition. Mr. Gilfillan was amazed at him—and so interested in his ideas. We have a lot of jade green to go with one of his songs—and I'll admit it does fit. Come—they've all gone out on the porch, and he's alone in here for the minute. I've arranged it that way—I want you to get your first impression of my young genius."

As the two went into the long, dignified old room that Alexandra had remembered with such warm admiration, she received quite as distinct an impression as Mary could have wished, though not, perhaps, wholly the one that Mary had intended. A slim figure in blue coat and white flannel trousers, a blue tie knotted under the pointed chin, fair hair thrust back from the wide forehead, got to its feet from the piano bench with a pair of crutches and stood waiting. Blue eyes on fire with excitement gazed straight at Mary; Guy Carter seemed not to have so much as a glance for the visitor until Mary presented him. Then he gave her a stiff little

formal bow which showed her the top of his head, and looked directly back at Mary. Even in that very first sight of him Alexandra recognized the fact—he was Mary's, every nerve and fibre of him.

But he was also the man of action, of authority. Boyish as he looked, Alexandra understood that the composer of "*Present Arms!*" who had now achieved a new musical play called *The Light on the Road*, was a personage to be consulted, deferred to, sometimes even to be pacified. Temperament, in all its variety of manifestations, was to be reckoned with in a young genius of unstable physical equipment who had been working for many months at high pressure, and whose hopes were now upon the verge of fulfillment. The first words from his lips gave evidence of the tension under which he was seeing through these last rehearsals.

"I've been having the devil's own time with that Mr. Hamilton," he burst out. "He thinks he knows it all, and he comes mighty near singing off key. I've got to have the horn give him the lead, every time, to keep him on it. And that makes him mad—and then we have it. Oh, this last-minute stuff is enough to drive a fellow out of his senses!"

"I know—I feel much the same way. When I get too much wound up I run off by myself and calm down. But really, everything's going splendidly, Guy. And I do want my friend, Miss Warren, to hear from you just a bit about the play. If you have time to tell her, it will be the only chance."

Guy frowned. "I'm afraid I haven't got the time, just now.—Well, just a word, then. But why don't you tell her, Miss Fletcher? She wrote the whole thing, you see,"—he turned to Alexandra—"I just put the music to it."

"Suppose, after all, neither of us tells her," Mary suggested quickly. She saw that Guy was really very much on edge,

for some fresh reason she didn't understand. "We'll let it break upon her without warning, as it's to do on the rest of the audience."

"Much better," Guy murmured, with a look of relief. "Now I'm off for the stage. If I'm not there for orchestra practice something'll go wrong."

Alexandra met them all presently—those whom she had known before and the new members of Mary's personnel. Rose O'Grady came rushing in for luncheon, fresh from the task of bandaging an injured shoulder. A big sophomore, who was to be a soldier in the play, had received the brunt of a falling beam and must be made fit again in a hurry. Alexandra was delighted with Rose, as Mary had foreseen.

"She says you've done it, Miss O'Grady—transformed her from a pale shadow to this splendid creature I see before me. Your methods ought to be spread abroad."

"Faith, 'tis no secret. Health may be had for the bit of pains any one should be ashamed not to take. Miss Mary's learned the law of supply and demand, that's all; to supply more than she demands—that's the whole story. Nature's a fine debtor but a hard creditor. Miss Mary had to pay her bill—and go to prison too. Now—the balance is in her favour, praises be. And it's proud I am to have helped teach her the lesson."

"Lessons—lessons—I've had plenty of them, Sandy. Dr. Reade's been another teacher. And here he is this minute—and Professor Chilton with him. I asked them up to meet you. Mr. Chilton's just in from a trip for funds. Come out to the table, everybody. I hoped Mr. Fenn would be here, too, but he's still missing."

Alexandra felt her interest quickening every minute. It was like Mary, in the midst of all the rush, to ask guests to luncheon to meet her friend. Harriet Fenn came over, also—it was quite a party, though so informal that two extra people,

arriving on errands, were urged to remain and places hurriedly arranged for them. Several times Mary was summoned from the table; messages were brought to her by note and wire; altogether the atmosphere was electric with the sense of something coming to which all were keyed.

"It's really rather a big thing these people are putting through," Dr. Reade observed to Alexandra, next whom he sat. "I'm an outsider, of course, having no part except that of general promoter as the chance comes in my practice. But I've been watching it all for weeks, and I'll admit I'm almost as excited and enthusiastic as they. The propaganda has got into my blood, too—it's been of a rather unusual effectiveness."

"I don't think such a thing has ever been done, in just such a way, has it?" Alexandra questioned.

"Not to our knowledge. Festivals and pageants and plays on classic lines have been done a thousand times, of course. And money has been raised, and all the rest of it. But there's been something about this whole campaign that's made it unique. One person has dominated it, and that person will be the centre of it all to the end—a mere girl, at that—a girl in effect, at least. And without making herself any part of the show itself—staying constantly in the wings. But inspiring, stimulating, keeping everybody up to the mark. I tell you, Miss Warren, it's remarkable."

"And you, as her physician, have felt it safe to let her do it?"

His answer was a significant glance toward Mary herself, where she sat at the head of her table, the silver bowl of roses in the centre of the table not fresher or more enchanting than she.

"You see for yourself. There's no rouge or powder on that skin, no 'beautifier' in those eyes. There's certainly no supporting drug in her system. I admit she's astonished me—

I can't wholly account for it, closely as I've watched her. She seems to have come upon some hidden spring of vitality and to drink of it all the time. She's done work enough to tire out a strong man—but, well—what can be said except that it's been a tonic of the most powerful sort?"

Alexandra was obliged to believe him. But her interest, not to say her wonder, was intensely aroused. It was impossible not to see that Mary was, as Dr. Reade had said, the focus upon which all rays converged, the very burning point of fire and energy. Alexandra had never known Mary except as a writer, absorbed in the production of her own wares; keen for experience that she could use, avid for sensation of every sort; constantly feeling her own pulse to get her own reactions. Though Alexandra had never been willing to admit it to herself, Mary had been thoroughly self-centred; her ambitions had been all in the way of her own fame; it had been only her personal charm which had held her friend to her—Mary had never returned to her a tenth of the real devotion Alexandra had lavished upon her. So it had been with every relation—Mary had taken—she had not given in return except as she had cared to give. Now, everything seemed changed. Instead, for instance, of poking fun at Newcomb, the small college in the small town, with no country-wide reputation, she was working for it, heart and soul. She was throwing into this effort everything she had to give, lavishing upon it her stores of wit and invention, challenging the world to come and see that here was every educational advantage that could be found anywhere. How had it happened? What had made the difference? Her friend wanted very much to know. Meanwhile, of one thing she was certain. Not in her most attractive aspect of days gone by had Mary given promise of that which she had become—a creature vital, forceful, and yet so lavish in her use of her own beauty and power that there was left no hint of the

old arrogance, only a warm and life-giving touch upon each other being with whom she came in contact.

"And you haven't a part in the play—or in anything?" Alexandra marvelled, as on the second morning after her arrival she watched Mary dress for the day. It was the great day, and it had dawned in all its September gorgeousness. The heat was that of summer and rather greater than was quite desirable, but the cloudlessness of the sky and the promise of freedom from the difficulties which rain would have produced in all this outdoor festival-making reconciled everybody to the undue warmth.

Mary's glance was understanding. "Not a part. Are you surprised? I suppose you expected me to put myself in the centre of the stage. Ride a white horse at the head of the pageant, and be crowned queen or something in front of the blue-and-purple drapery. I admit it would be quite in character—and rather fun to ride the white horse, at least. But I have quite all I want to do, behind the scenes, and I shouldn't be half as happy in front of them. As a compromise I'm going to look as nice as I can, in my rôle of general handy man. Tell me how you like me."

It seemed to Alexandra that Mary actually shone! It was only a trim little white serge suit she wore, with white shoes and tight little white hat with crisp-looking wings, but she might have posed as a model for a feminine Hermes of modern times, so winged was the whole look of her. Her eyes were darker than ever under the close-drawn hat-brim—their glance was the quickest, most shining thing imaginable.

"The Professor's back—he's asking for you downstairs, Miss Mary," Rose announced, coming in. "Whist! and it's more new clothes, is it? I believe you got them for the occasion."

"Of course I did! Think of the people I'm to meet to-day. I'm going to the train now to welcome two college presidents

and a real dignitary in the literary line. It's my duty to impress them with the fact that we're not a back-woods institution, and what can do it so certainly as the right clothes? Besides—you two look pretty smart yourselves—Miss Warren in that clever gray and lavender effect, Miss O'Grady in what I call a mighty knowing black and white, and just the thing to go with her wondrous hair—if I did choose it for her. Who's to say anything about new clothes?"

Mary was off down the stairs. Rose's following glance returned to Alexandra.

"I'm glad the Professor's back. He's looking worn with the work he's been doing all summer—it was a task for a Titan. But when he catches sight of Miss Mary Fletcher as she's looking to-day—I'm thinking he'll forget how tired he is. It's an odd thing, Miss Warren, when you think of it; but dusky eyes and hair like hers under a little white hat like that can look to have more colour than a whole rainbow! She'll dazzle the eyes of him—and his eyes need dazzling, he's been looking so long at folks explaining why they should like to give more—but can't."

Downstairs Mark and Mary were meeting in the cool and shaded drawing-room, rich with flowers from the garden everywhere.

"I was beginning to be afraid you wouldn't be here in time to play host," she said, as they shook hands.

"I delayed twenty-four hours—and have ten thousand dollars to show for it. But I wouldn't have missed being here to-day for ten thousand more.—Mary, *you* haven't been through a campaign, you've been sitting on an island in the sun!"

"A pretty populous island, then," she assured him, "with all kinds of craft coming into my harbour."

They were openly taking observations upon each other, and the result seemed satisfying.

"You're not looking half as worn as when I saw you, that evening at Stevenson," Mary said.

"I'm not half as worn. In fact, I'm not worn at all. From that hour I've been carrying no load—the load carried me. I was a trifle weary when I came into town an hour ago, but hot water and clean clothes have made me feel like a new man. And now that I see you—Mary, this is a wonderful day! I think it's going to be the greatest day in my history—I hope it is in yours."

"I'm sure it is. And I suppose we must both be off this very minute. I'm meeting some personages at the train in just fifteen minutes—the car is waiting for me. Don't you want to go along? And aren't we in luck to have such weather?"

They went out upon the porch, still saying casual things. Yet each was aware of the other in the way which means strong mutual interest. As never before Mary was conscious that Mark Fenn looked every inch the man in a way she had always known him to do, yet never fully appreciated until now. As they stood waiting upon the station platform she felt herself proud of his companionship. She recalled what the headmaster of Stevenson had said of him—the impression had been instantly one of force and charm. She realized now that he must make that impression upon any intelligent stranger; she was glad to have him by her side as she received her distinguished guests.

The train drew in. Mary looked for President Wesley and Dean Grier, and saw them far down the platform. As she and Mark went to meet them a tall figure stepped off the Pullman at her side and turned to help down a slenderly small one which followed. Mary stopped short, for John Kirkwood wheeled, sweeping off his hat, and drew forward by one hand the girl who accompanied him.

"Mary! This is great luck, though we meant to surprise

you. Miss Fletcher, let me present Miss Langley.—How do you do, Professor Fenn! Miss Langley, this is Professor Fenn, of Newcomb—destined some day to become its president."

For the instant Mary forgot her expected guests for these others, one of whom was most certainly unexpected. She gave Sibley Langley her hand, looking down into a piquant, laughing face, whose bright and rather intriguingly narrow brown eyes seemed to be turned upon her like a pair of little telescopes. Miss Langley was a slip of a thing, perfectly dressed, with a touch of daring in her modishness, and all the air of one accustomed to be liked and entirely at home everywhere. Yet her manner to Mary had in it a pretty hint of deference, more effective than the words she was too wise to speak.

"Will you forgive us?" Miss Langley had a musically soft voice, with a suggestion of a Southern drawl which hardly matched the quick glances of her eyes. "I so wanted to come I fairly bribed Mr. Kirkwood to bring me, though I'm sure he didn't quite approve of it. I knew you would take care of me somehow, among your guests."

"Yes, of course, I shall be charmed to have you as my guest," Mary said, "even though we're just a bit too full at the house to be able to look after Mr. Kirkwood. It was really very wonderful of you to come and to surprise us."

"My sister and I will take care of Mr. Kirkwood, with pleasure." Mark came to the rescue. "And now, Mary—here are your other guests"—and he gently turned her about barely in time to halt the two strangers in silk hats and formal morning dress who had been approaching and upon whom he had been keeping a watchful eye.

Kirkwood and Miss Langley at a few paces distant watched the meeting, the eyes of both missing nothing.

"You didn't prepare me for Professor Fenn," Miss Langley whispered. "'Country college professor' doesn't seem to fit him. He's stunningly good looking in his severe and quiet way."

"He's been to a real tailor in preparation for this event," Kirkwood murmured in return. "I'll admit he does look rather more sophisticated than I remembered him. How does his companion strike you?"

"Oh—as all you could ask, of course. That goes without saying. She's very charming. Only I thought of her as more of an invalid."

"Invalid!" Kirkwood had some ado to restrain his mirth as his absorbed gaze continued to rest upon Mary. "Good heavens! She looks like Hebe and Diana combined. Never was she so young and valiant."

The big car took them all to the Graham house, where Miss Langley looked about her in amazement. She hadn't been prepared for the dignified old place. Mary took her to her own room, mentally arranging for herself a couch in Alexandra's.

"Such a delightful house," the young guest said, with real appreciation. "Only I somehow know you're giving me your room, Miss Fletcher. I'd beg you not—only—if you'll let me say so—it's such a lovely honour to have it. I shan't forget. Mr. Kirkwood has always raved about you so—and now I know why."

"Mr. Kirkwood has many enthusiasms—among them yourself, Miss Langley. And it was so good of you to come to do honour to our great day. You won't mind, though, will you, if I'm a very casual hostess? There are so many last-minute things to see to, you know."

"Oh, of course. And we shall be entirely self-reliant—just don't have us on your mind, please. Mr. Kirkwood and I simply wanted to prove to you how interested we are."

Mutual felicitations and conventionalities thus quickly disposed of, Mary soon vanished, not to appear again till luncheon. Meanwhile, Alexandra Warren and Rose O'Grady assumed the care of the various guests who arrived from time to time, now and then meeting to exchange amused comments. Though so different in personality and experience, the two had taken to each other as those do who find common ground.

"That little person with the eyes like gimlets," said Rose, in a corner of the wide hall where she had run upon Alexandra unexpectedly, "is losing nothing she can bore them into, at all. I hear she's a writer. I'm thinking her next novel will have us all in."

"She's very pretty and clever, isn't she?" Alexandra returned, smiling.

"She's gone a bit crazy about the Professor. She's had him walking down the garden with her—and him looking at his watch every two minutes when she chanced to be turned the other way—which was seldom. I thought she'd be breaking her little neck, looking up at him. He got away, though, sooner than pleased her. And him wanting to be with Miss Mary—and never getting a chance."

"Nobody can get a chance at Mary to-day. Yet she's everywhere."

She was everywhere. The last draping of the blue-and-purple-curtains—with Mr. Perry Gilfillan at her elbow. The final hearing of one brief scene which had gone badly at rehearsal the evening before. A consultation with Guy Carter, who was so nervous he could hardly control himself, yet ready to be wildly happy at a hint from Mary that she understood and didn't think him a weak fool because of his shaking fingers.

"If *you're* only satisfied I can bear everything else," he said, his strained gaze on her face. "Oh, Miss Fletcher, if

you could see yourself to-day—you wouldn't wonder I—want to please you."

"Listen to me, Guy. If everything else went wrong—which it won't, it's going to go splendidly—one thing you've done would be worth it all to me."

"What's that? Please tell me—maybe it'll steady me."

"The music for the last song—"The Light on the Road." That's mine, Guy, to keep."

"Oh!——"

But she didn't dare to linger with him—his heart was too plainly on his sleeve when she was by. She ran away to others who needed her—an anxious young soprano, a group of boys who had a difficult small part and only wanted her encouragement. There were the usual number of small details to be seen to—last minute happenings which it took resource to adjust: a lost trumpet, a torn flag, the non-arrival of a painted brick wall promised yesterday and still unaccounted for. Mary did her best to keep cool, but now and then had to set a watch upon herself lest she lose the poise she needed so much to hold.

Just before luncheon she came into the house by way of a small side entrance under the staircase, and evading the sight of any guest made her way up to Rose's room. Here she slipped out of her outer garments and lay down upon Rose's bed with both arms outstretched. Two minutes later the owner of the room appeared in the doorway and stopped short, nodding her approval.

Mary waved a white arm at her. "Just catching up," she said.

Rose came over. "You're the wise girl," she approved, and passed her own cool fingers up and up the satiny firm skin, nurse fashion. "You're doing nobly but you have to breathe, now and then. We're all quite busy with the questions they're all asking. Faith, I know those questions

by heart.—'What is the size of Newcomb, can you tell me, Miss O'Grady?'—'When did I understand the new building was begun?'—'Miss Fletcher seems to have accomplished great things—it is quite remarkable, isn't it?'—But the little one with the piercing eyes has it all over the rest for curiosity. What she doesn't know about Mary Fletcher by now is what Miss Alexandra and Rosie O'Grady haven't told her!"

Mary laughed. "How do you manage it? And what does she want to know?"

"Everything—and then some. But she's clever. You hardly know she's asking questions—till you find yourself biting your tongue to pinch back the answer. But the thing she wants to know is—if Miss Fletcher is engaged to marry anybody."

"She hasn't asked that!"

"Oh, no—she hasn't asked that. Of course not. She's the lady—entirely. But I've had a hard time not to tell her. All roads lead the same way—and no sign-post till you've nearly taken them. She's a beguilin' way with her—that innocent. I could quite like her—if I didn't heartily dislike her!"

"Rosie—I love you!"

"Do you, now? Then—play up to her. Don't walk away and leave her guessing—the way you like to do. Load your pistols, shake hands, walk back ten paces—and fire!"

"You homicidal person! Suppose I don't care to?"

"Oh, well—there's no need. You've everything in your own hands—and on your hands too. I just like to see a bloody deed now and then, instead of such politeness. It's more satisfyin'."

Rose was always refreshing, and when, a few minutes afterward, every smooth hair again in place, Mary slipped down to rejoin her guests at luncheon, she felt almost as fit as in the morning. A cup of her own deliciously strong and fragrant

coffee completed the revival, and after it she was ready for the afternoon, with all its demands.

The pageant, a thousand participants, wound its picturesque way along the campus, passed across the great stage before the classic blue-and-purple draperies. In the seats a thousand patrons watched and applauded. From the orchestra rose martial strains. A concert, with soloists from abroad, and a fine male quartette from at home, occupied two hours of the afternoon. The college glee-and-string club did itself honour. President Wing made a welcoming speech. Crowds filled the campus, standing; the steps and windows of the surrounding buildings were thick with interested people. But the event of the day was to come in the evening; with all its varied interests the afternoon was only preliminary.

"Are you having a good time, Sandy? It's a shame I haven't a minute to give you."

"A beautiful time, dear. Your Professor Chilton has been with me all the afternoon—a most stimulating companion."

Mary gave her friend an appraising glance. Both were dressing for the evening.

"Sandy, remember the evening of the Fenns' dinner? When you walked away with the Englishman and the American, and left me stranded with the Hottentot and the Zulu? You were wearing that dovelike gray crêpe—and I a crazy concoction of brilliant colours. Before the evening was over I came to feel like an Indian squaw beside a Caucasian lady of quality."

Alexandra laughed. "Mary—how often have I heard you say that restraint is the first law of expression."

"So I've come to believe, in dress as well as in speech. Well, behold then what I'm wearing to-night. I've taken a leaf out of your book. And the odd thing is that I've never

felt more brilliantly costumed than I did when I tried these things all on."

Over her white shoulders slipped a frock of pale gray, mistily thin and sheer, Parisian to the last line. From a big bandbox she took a wide flat little hat of the same gray, whose only decoration was a band of gray willow, ready to flutter to a breath of wind. Smiling at Alexandra she set the hat upon her head, held out both arms, model-wise, and turned slowly about.

"It's quite perfect, dear. I never saw you look so lovely. To use the present-day phrase—you're stunning! And with all your splendid colour you don't need a touch of colour in your frock."

Mary put an eager question. "Is it silly and frivolous of me, at the very most thrilling hour of our whole campaign, to be thinking so much of how I look? Much depends on me to-night, you know. Somehow I wanted to appeal in looks, if I could, to all those critical eyes. I suppose it's the old story of the feminine reliance upon personal charm, and yet —one needn't be a frump just to prove one's sincerity and reliability, need one?"

"One certainly needn't. Why shouldn't you delight our eyes as you've done all day? One who's accomplished what you have, all summer, has surely proved both her sincerity and her reliability."

"I hope so. I just didn't want to seem to you quite the old Mary, always setting the stage for her own performance. You know, Sandy,"—and now Mary's face grew sober with a look new to Alexandra until this day, when she had observed it many times—the peculiar look of one who is absorbed in something quite outside and beyond herself—"I've been living with some very wonderful people, these last six months. Every one of them, each in his or her way, has done something to me. My doctor and my nurse began it—Dr. Christo-

pher Reade and Rose O'Grady are—oh, so tremendously real and splendid. One can't be with them and not learn to despise all kinds of affectations and poses. It's like carrying a painted face out into the sunshine to try to deceive or mislead them—it simply can't be done."

"Mary! I knew you'd grown, my dear—but I didn't know how much. This one thing you're saying would show me, if I hadn't been watching you all day.—And how about the other people——"

"Guy Carter—his genius—his insight—yes, that boy has remarkable insight into human nature—he gets down to the very springs of human action, young as he is. One can't deceive him, either—or want to. As for Mark Fenn,"—Mary paused, closing her two hands into fists and then bringing them up before her with the gesture which a speaker uses when he wishes to denote force—"he's been—like a rock—a wall—a tower——"

She broke off, drawing a quick, deep breath, and smiling.

"I must go. There never was a day so full. Bless you for seeing to so many people for me—I don't know what I'd have done without you. Oh, if the evening only goes as I want it to I'll be gloriously happy! If it does—I think I'll almost be content never to write another word."

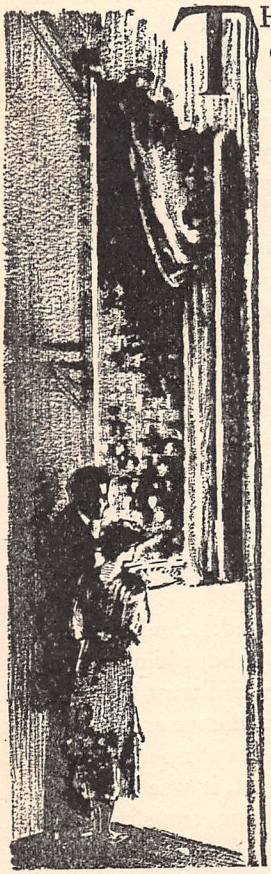
Alexandra smiled. "Mary! What a statement!"

Mary turned at the door, looking back at her friend.

"Which, being interpreted," she said, her face lifted, her eyes starry, "means that I'll want to write a hundred thousand words and make them bigger, truer, surer than anything I've ever dreamed of. 'Else wherefore born?'"

## CHAPTER XX

### The Light on the Road



THE violins! There seemed a hundred of them crying softly in the night, as the curtains rose on those deep blues and purples of the long draperies, darkened to all but obscurity. The thousand lights upon the campus and about the amphitheatre had faded, one by one, till all were gone. Little by little the scene upon the great stage had become dimly visible—a marvellous effect of darkness and mystery. Throughout the opening overture nothing changed or moved —the story was told by the music alone.

In the wings Guy Carter, leaning toward the front, beat the measures with an invisible bâton. If he could have been his own conductor he would have been more content. As it was, a hundred rehearsals couldn't have satisfied him. The orchestra Mary had procured for him was one of high quality, the conductor a man of experience. But Guy was ablaze with excitement and anxiety; from the first moment, if a tempo lagged or

quickened with the variation of a half-beat from his intent, he was ready to tear his fair hair and cry out a command. If after that first subdued singing murmur of the violins their volume increased too fast, he was wild with distress. Rose O'Grady standing behind him, laid a steadying hand upon his shoulder.

"It's opening well, sonny—it's wonderful and beautiful," she whispered, at one crisis. "It's just overkeyed you are—let down! You've got a lot before you."

"I can't!"

Mary Fletcher was also listening from the wings. She could see the audience—a dim gray sea, the faces indistinguishable. She knew where her guests sat—seven rows from the front and in the middle. She had seen Mark take his place, alone in the last seat at the extreme edge of the fifth row. Her heart was beating hard.

Mark had had no preconceived idea as to what he was to see and hear. On his brief returns to Newcomb, throughout the long summer of travel and speeches and personal interviews, he had now and again inquired of Mary what it was all to be about, but he had received no definite information. He hadn't been invited to any rehearsals, nor had he been consulted in any way. In the beginning Mary had put a question:

"Can you trust us to do the right thing, Mark? Are you willing to leave it all in our hands?"

"To the last detail," he had answered. And he had divined, at length, that she preferred not to have him know even the general plan of it. So be it—for he did trust her. Now, however, as he had watched the great audience assemble, and had taken his own place, he was conscious of a sense not only of anticipation but of anxiety. After all, it was his ground, his college, his partially completed building, transformed into this impressive stage and background. Among the audience

were many whose critical intelligence was trained and keen; he noted here and there men and women whose opinion was important; in a word, as he waited it began to seem to him that Newcomb's whole future was in the balance, that it was to be judged by the quality of this performance. And it was all in the hands of Mary Fletcher and Guy Carter, unquestionably two clever young people who might—or might not—have had the vision needed for this hour of judgment—for that was what it now seemed to him. With all his honest confidence in Mary, had he been quite safe in trusting her with so heavy a responsibility? Wouldn't he have been wiser, perhaps, to have exercised his undoubted right of censorship?

He thought of her as he had last seen her—he had caught a glimpse of her in the attractive gray apparel of the evening as she came out of her house with her guests. She had looked so young and for the moment so little like one upon whose shoulders rested the burden of the coming test of power: was she really equal to it? With all her gifts—and he recalled with a stirring of the heart her talk to the boys at Stevenson; remembered the fine tone of the letters and articles she had sent out during the whole campaign—still, with all these to witness her ability, could she possibly have conceived and executed the dramatic offering worthy those tall, wreathed pillars, those impressive blue-and-purple draperies, this whole atmosphere of poetic beauty and challenge to high imagination?

He was indignant at himself for even the shadow of a doubt of her. Yet when he remembered her collaborator—a mere boy, whose only previous test had been that of a successful war-time musical comedy, expert and excellent work though it had been—could Mary really have been able to make him rise high enough for this supreme effort? As the curtain slowly rose and the lights darkened, Mark had to fold his arms tightly across his breast and let his hands grip

the muscles of those arms, to keep down his rising fear that somehow, somewhere, so crucial a submitting to the verdict of the educated public might fall short. He well knew that it might as well fall short by a wide space as a narrow one; there could be no real approval of anything that was not fully fit.

The opening overture was unquestionably reassuring. In the soft gloom, only a faint light showing a stage which recalled the best of Grecian art, the music of the orchestra fulfilled and satisfied that first demand for harmony and prophetic suggestion which prepares an audience for that which is to come. Mark felt his pulses quiet a little under the inducement of what seemed to him a dignified and worthy inaugural. He thought he recognized in it the influence of Mary's effort to inoculate Guy's methods with the germ of the best in musical accomplishment. Certainly there was no trace of commonplaceness in this opening, to which the audience was listening in that complete hush which speaks of interest already captured. There is no audience so courteous that it can wholly simulate this attitude.

But now the play opened.

As he began to recognize the theme of it Mark also began to be astonished. How had she chosen such a theme as this? And yet—how not?—considering the blood which flowed in her veins. Had ever such a central figure been made the subject of a drama? It was the figure of him who throughout the years has played one of the most significant rôles in life, yet perhaps of all the least appreciated. The teacher!

In the opening act the first scene showed the child—the second the youth—the third the young collegian. In each scene his teacher was beside him, showing him the way. And in each scene his teacher was also his friend—his understanding, inspiring friend. This was the whole first act.

The actors in it were few and well chosen—simplicity in word and action was its keynote—the attendant music having the same character in *motif* and development. Here and there touches of humour in the bright dialogue kept the audience smiling, yet when the curtain fell it was to leave an impression of quiet power—the power of one life upon another from the very first days of education.

The second act was of a different complexion. Life, its storm and struggle, was at hand—the whole aspect of things had altered; no longer was the teacher at his pupil's side. But his teaching remained—his influence persisted. And another teacher had arisen—human friendship—the friendship of one who had himself been taught. As the act mounted to its climax it grew more and more noble in its conception, and with its closing scene a song came ringing through the still air which seemed to Mark to fall at his very feet.

Months earlier he had given to Mary Fletcher a book known and beloved of many who had found in it much beauty and wisdom, written almost a quarter of a century before by one in his youth, yet who had even then shown the marks of that genius which afterward made him one of the first of the preachers and teachers of the world. Mark had underlined certain words which to him had taken on a personal meaning. Mary had thanked him for his gift, but had never afterward alluded to it. Fearing that the message of that marked paragraph had been one with which she could not sympathize, he also had been silent. And now—here was this song! What could it be but the answer to that message?

This was the paragraph he had marked:

> But whatever be the method by which a true friendship is formed, whether the growth of time or the birth of sudden sympathy, there seems, on looking back, to have been an element of necessity. It is a sort of predestined spiritual relationship. We speak of a man

meeting his fate, and we speak truly. When we look back we see it to have been like destiny; life converged to life, and there was no getting out of it, even if we wished it. It was not that we made a choice, but that the choice made us. If it has come gradually, we waken to the force which has been in our lives, and has come into them never hasting but never resting, till now we know it to be an eternal possession. Or, as we are going about other business, never dreaming of the thing which occurs, the unexpected happens: *on the road a light shines on us, and life is never the same again.*

And this was the song which, in a clear, bell-like contralto, every syllable so distinct that he could not miss a word, came across the space to Mark Fenn and dropped like a divine gift of gratitude and love into his heart. For such he knew—and knew not how he knew—it was. Somehow it wasn't possible to doubt that no matter who sang it, or who wrote the fitting music for it, it came straight from Mary Fletcher to Mark Fenn. It was for this moment that she had kept it all a secret from him—blessed secret that was between them, though proclaimed in a thousand ears!

A heavenly mystery has come to me,
Where once my eyes were held they now can see.
I do not know, indeed, just how it came,
Or how to speak of it, or guess its name.
It did not creep upon me unawares,
Or come in answer to beseeching prayers;
But as I walked along life's rugged road,
My shoulders bent beneath a heavy load,
The song upon my weary lips grown still,
My only hope to keep a steadfast will—
What sudden shone upon my blinded sight?
—I only know—"Upon the Road a Light!"

And now life never can be quite the same.
A purpose new is mine, a higher aim.
My heart is freer far, my pulse more strong;
The way is easier, and not half so long.

The song is sweet upon my lips again,
I sing and sing a blessed new refrain.
The road may wind and climb—I upward leap,
No path too stony, and no height too steep.
My friend keeps pace with me; I hear his voice;
I feel his faith; he makes my soul rejoice.
All things are changed since shines this vision bright,
Undimmed, unchanging—"On the Road a Light!"

With the ending of the song and the fall of the curtain Mark left his place; he couldn't sit there and exchange comments with those nearest him. As he went he heard the warm applause, continued to the furthermost limit of friendly custom with its recall of actors and musicians. He caught the looks on faces, recognized that people were saying kind, delighted words on every hand; heard one man on the outskirts whom he knew to be a critic of considerable distinction observe in a tone of characteristically grudging admission, "For this sort of thing it's rather remarkably well done, you know." Mark understood that from him even such modified commendation was worth considerably more than any ordinary ecstatic praise.

He made his way round to the "stage entrance"—in this case an unfinished doorway at the back of the building reached by a wide plank. Following one clue after another he at length found Mary. He put a low-voiced question.

"Would it be possible for you to come around and see the last act from the front, somewhere, with me?"

Her eyes met his, in the dim light of the "wings."

"I'm afraid I can't be spared. I'm truly sorry."

"Then—may I stay here with you?"

"You'll miss our most glorified effect, if you do."

"I don't mind. I can see a good deal from here, I'm sure. And hear it all.—Mary—please let me stay. And when you can, come here with me?"

She nodded. "If you really prefer." Then she was off, at the appeal of an anxious young actor.

He saw what she was doing. She was holding them all together, these amateurs who were trying their best to put into hers and Guy Carter's work the thing asked of them—an all but professional interpreting of the spirit of the whole. Perry Gilfillan was behind the scenes, he who had studied and worked for many years at just this sort of presentation, so that he had made a name for himself and his presence was invaluable. Yet it was Mary to whom all looked for that last word before they made an entrance, for her criticism or her approbation; it was she who kept things tight and yet not on over tension. She, more than Gilfillan himself, was responsible for the fine restraint noticeable throughout all speech and action—the very mark of quality, even in the portrayal of passion. Not a turn of head, not a lift of arm, but she had worked it out for herself, according to what Gilfillan himself had admitted to be a rather marvellous dramatic instinct.

He came upon Mark in the wings, just before the final curtain rose, and poured out upon him the enthusiasm roused in him by Mary's coaching and by her efficiency behind the scenes, as well as by the performance itself. Mark wasn't eager to talk to anybody, but he found himself listening willingly to the expert's judgment.

"She's simply the whole thing," Gilfillan said, with a nod of his bushy head toward a stage entrance where Mary stood with her hand upon the shoulder of a slim young figure in the costume of a page. "On my word, while Carter's supposed to be the composer of the musical setting for her text, I'm inclined to think it's a case of pure evocation. She's worked through his brain—she's made him capable of something beyond and above him. The boy worships her, of course—who wouldn't? All of us are at her feet. To tell the truth, I

never was much impressed by her popularity as a writer; her stuff usually struck me as the sparkling, glittering, no-count sort not worth a man's serious consideration. It didn't interest me. But I tell you this is a different brand—it's the real thing. Faulty, of course, here and there—but the conception is, to me, very fine indeed, and worthy of a mature mind. You can't say she hasn't done a big thing for the cause of education in this presentation of the teacher as a figure of heroic size. And he deserves it—he deserves it. But it's taken this brilliant young woman, with the personality to attract the best of any class and the genius to exploit it, to throw herself heart and soul into the glorification of the humble teacher—like yourself and myself. See here—you must be appreciating this thing. I'm not at all sure you didn't inspire it!"

Mark shook his head. "It comes of a life-long association with the teaching world. You knew her father?"

"I didn't—but his name is one of the high lights in the history of the great private schools, of course.—The curtain's going up. You should be in front, Fenn. Don't miss this."

Gilfillan hastened away. Mark found himself a corner just behind the prompter where he could see as much of the stage as might be covered from the wings. He looked and listened with considerable abstraction to the short last act. His mind and heart were occupied with just one thing—*On the Road a Light!*

Mary came to him once and remained a possible five minutes. Together they watched a most appealing scene upon the stage representing the reunion of a group of mature men and women with a former beloved teacher, himself a bowed but still vigorous old man. The dialogue was at once humorous and tender, and so convincingly human that it brought a choke into the throat in the very midst of the laughter. The music which accompanied the scene was that

of which Mary was surest, and into which she had led Guy to put his best work.

As the act drew to a close Mary whispered: "I'm going with you in just a minute to the back of the audience. I want you to see the final effect from there." She slipped away, but returned, and Mark followed her as she led the way out and around the edges of the audience to a position where, standing, they could see plainly over the heads of everyone. The curtain had fallen, but it now rose again.

A large group of people in the costumes of Orientals sat and stood about a central figure, one familiar to all students of religious art. A veil had been dropped between audience and stage, so that no face was distinct, but the effect was that of a great painting, dimmed with age, the colourings softly blending. As the audience gazed in silence a light slowly began to show, seeming to emanate from that central figure, which towered above the rest, in the attitude of Him who speaks with authority and yet with gentleness. The picture grew in loveliness and meaning as the central light increased, and the rest of the scene grew slowly dim. No eyes, however prejudiced, could deny the beauty of the spiritual suggestion, nor its power. No words were needed to name that scene. "The Great Teacher" it set forth, no other.

If Mark had been touched and roused before, he was now so deeply moved that speech would have been at the moment beyond him. What a thing it was to have done—this was his overwhelming thought—what a chance to have seen and seized! To carry the theme of the play, with all its human appeal, on to the Divine—to have dared to try to lift it even "to the Heaven's heights far and steep"—this had been a conception approaching the sublime. To begin with simplicity and laughter; to catch all hearts with a hundred human touches even while the theme grew graver; then, at last, to

bring to it even the light which shines from another world—this was art at its best. Indeed, it seemed to Mark more than art; it was inspiration itself—the fire of an imagination so near to genius that one must look upon it with reverence.

Now, as the vision held, a chorus began, singing in the distance, gradually swelling, like some great processional. It was the whole student body, marching two by two, clad in white cassocks and cottas, like a choir. The lines wound out upon the stage, gradually hiding from view the scene behind them, and the music of the song was—Mark recognized it with a thrill of remembrance—that of the Beethoven Choral from the Ninth Symphony, the Hymn to Joy.

The curtain fell. The applause broke out, and swelled to an acclaim which would not be denied. The call for the author and composer of the play arose, and Mark hurried back with Mary, no word spoken between them. Then Mary and Guy came out before the curtain, a pair whose appearance made the tumult break out again. Guy upon his crutches and in his uniform—Mary had insisted upon this, declaring that the one would explain the other, without need of words—Mary herself a figure of shining appeal, stood and waited for a long minute. Guy's head was bent, Mary's smiling face turned toward him, as if she would have the honours go all to him, who had so little else to make him happy. Then Mary spoke.

"We want you to know," she said—and the thrilling cadences of her voice carried to the last row of the audience, though she seemed not to be lifting it unduly—"that we are very, very proud and content, not so much to have pleased you—though that makes us happy indeed—as because we feel that our theme has been one with which it has been not only a joy but a mighty privilege to work. In our hearts, as we tried to build the tale, was the inspiration of a memory beloved in the history of Newcomb—that of a man who gave all that he was

and had to her upbuilding. If, in our small way, we may have brought one more leaf to add to the laurels which rest richly upon the mention of his name, we have accomplished our purpose. And if you, who have listened with such generous approval, would join us in our effort to pay to the memory of David Matthew Fenn something of the great debt we owe him here at Newcomb, won't you——"

And she lifted both arms with a gesture at once commanding and beseeching. The audience rose to its feet with that instant unanimity of response which gives its full consent. The moment was one of real emotion, long to be remembered.

The affair broke up, people crowded upon the stage to speak with sons and daughters. Rose and Alexandra piloted Mary's special guests back to the house, the party supplemented by the members of the faculty and their wives. Torch-lights and lanterns here and there about the garden made an effective scene of it. There was soft music somewhere on the grounds.

As hostess, every moment of Mary's was taken care of. She turned from one to another who claimed her attention, and had no time to spare for the one person who was in all her thoughts. But she observed that he was never far away, and every now and then she caught his look across the space between them—a look which said: "Something has happened!" Her heart beat high. She had a strange sense of an invisible bond tying her to this man. She divined that he must be feeling it as she did. She had made her confession and her vows of friendship to him in that song, wittingly and willingly. She hadn't known till she had heard it go to him from the singer's lips how full a confession or how great a vow it was. Not until she had seen his face, as he came to her behind the scenes, had she fully understood that to him it had meant everything. If she had admitted that to her his

friendship was all that the song declared, then there could be but one conclusion. Friendship of that degree, with no barrier to prevent, must as inevitably become love as the tide rolling up the beach must reach its high-water mark. Though hardly a word passed between the two it was a great and memorable hour.

Soon after the return to the house John Kirkwood managed somehow to bring about a brief interview with Mary. More than once during the day he had tried his best to see her alone, but her guests were too many, the demands upon her time too frequent. Now, however, he deliberately led her away from the house down across the lawn toward the garden.

"You must give me ten minutes," he had whispered. "You owe me that much."

"Of course. I'm so sorry——"

"No, you're not. You haven't wanted to see me alone. I understand that. . . . At least you don't mind my telling you what you already know: you've done a big thing to-night."

"I didn't do it alone."

He gave her a comprehending glance. "I know you didn't," he said, with a bitterness of inflection he couldn't keep out of his tone, and he smothered a hard breath. "So your life is dedicated to Newcomb College. May I offer my felicitations?"

Mary looked at him quickly, saw the pain in his eyes, and was gentler with him than at the first sound of his words she had had a mind to be.

"I can't just understand how you came to say that. Surely you haven't had any evidence of my dedication?"

"I wish I hadn't. But it's written all over you—for my eyes, at least. You must remember that I've had unusual advantages for acquiring the ability to read you. Just

now—you're a peculiarly open book, my dear—to me, at least!"

Mary was flushing; she turned her head away in silence. What use to deny the truth? She understood the disappointment behind his words and forgave him.

"I suppose I'm rather brutal. But I imagine you read me quite as clearly as I read you, so you can't hold it against me. I came here to see if there remained a ghost of a chance for me—I found there wasn't. If I take it hard you needn't blame yourself—you've been perfectly fair. But that hasn't prevented your drawing me. It's all happened since I saw you up here last June. Before that you were just a talented and very charming girl to whom I was devoted. Since then you've become—do you care to hear it?—the woman I want. That I know I can't have you doesn't help it any—naturally."

She looked at him now, clear-eyed. "John Kirkwood," she said, "I'm not the woman you want. It's a very different sort of woman you want."

He spoke quickly with a frown. "Don't tell me—what you're going to. I haven't the least inclination—nor thought——"

She was silent, checked—not in what she had been about to say, which was not what he had surmised—but in the effort to put what had seemed must appeal to him. After a moment he spoke again.

"I shall go on now—as I was. Back in the office, in the old grind, with the old methods. I ought to be content, since I have everything my own way. Have it—that is—in everything except this one thing that matters most."

"You don't want it most."

"Why should you say that?"

"Because I know. We shouldn't fit, you and I."

"We did fit—wonderfully, once."

She shook her head. "Not in the ways that count most. We should fit less, now."

"You mean—you've gone ahead of me?" he suggested, raspingly. "For of course you have. I admit it."

"I didn't mean that—you know I didn't. And I think you know what I do mean. Please say so honestly, John Kirkwood."

She looked straight into his eyes, and his own dropped before them. He raised them again, after a moment. "Yes, I know," he admitted. "You've adopted a set of ideals I consider puritanic. But that doesn't mean we couldn't find common ground. However—I'm too late. I—wish you well—of your college professor. By and by, perhaps, when you've had time to get tired of your sober little town, you'll come down to our big one—and we'll show you around. Some things may shock you——"

He turned away, with an attempt at a laugh, but she saw that he was really very unhappy and so again quite forgave him. She did this the more readily as a slim little figure in a coral crêpe frock and a striking feathery wrap came toward them. She had caught a sudden glimpse of his face as he saw Sibley Langley approaching across the lantern-lighted turf.

"I'm sorry to interrupt. But Miss Fenn's looking everywhere for you, Miss Fletcher, and I promised to try to find you. It's something urgent, I believe."

"I'll go at once—thank you."

"We'll go back with you." Miss Langley laid her hand on Kirkwood's arm. "Come, John—don't glower so. We'll come back again and try that lovely path through the garden."

"Just a minute, Mary——" Kirkwood all but shook off the detaining small hand; it couldn't quite be done. He took a stride toward Mary, who was poised for flight. "I want

to tell you," he said distinctly, "that the thing you did tonight was by far the best of its kind I've ever seen done. Your parables and your mysticism got even me—for the hour. I can't follow you—but I shall never forget."

"Oh, it was beautiful!" cried Sibley Langley. "We're so glad we came, aren't we, John?"

Then Mary made her escape. She was very sorry for him, but she knew that though he might not forget, neither might he long remember. His was another world, where remembering such exalted hours isn't much done.

She found Harriet in the house, looking everywhere. At the sight of her Harriet's relief expressed itself in an excited whisper.

"Oh, I was so afraid I wouldn't find you in time. Mark has to go away again in a hurry. He wants to see you. Run over to our house with me, will you?"

"Go away again!"

Startled, Mary excused herself to the people who would have claimed her. On the way across the lawn Harriet made a hurried explanation.

"There's a man here—a very influential man—a Mr. Lloyd—who's become so interested in Newcomb he's made a plan to acquire a big sum of money for us—perhaps even an endowment. He knows an old, very wealthy philanthropist who's almost at the point of death. He's looking for places to leave his riches. Mr. Lloyd has offered to take Mark to him and introduce him—he's sure Mark can put the case better than he or anybody can. Mr. Lloyd's leaving in half an hour and Mark's agreed to go with him. We've been rushing around getting ready. Mark's been having a conference with the trustees—they're still here. But he told me he must see you for just a minute."

They were at the porch. Through the open study windows the heads of gray-haired men could be seen; their voices talk-

ing earnestly were audible. Harriet led Mary past the study door and into the small parlour opposite, where an old-fashioned prism-hung lamp burned with a goldenly mellow glow. A moment later Harriet had gone, a door had opened and closed and Mark came in.

He was tense with an excitement unlike anything she had ever seen in him before; it showed through his evident effort at repression.

"Mary, this is the biggest chance Newcomb's ever had. All this last hour I've wanted to call you over to take a part in our plans, but somehow felt I'd better not. You know our trustees—grateful as they are to you they'll want the honour of putting this thing over by themselves. You understand——"

"Of course."

"I'd rather be hung, drawn and quartered than go off again to-night—to-night of all times in the world. Yet as Lloyd puts it I see no other way. Harriet told you? Anything might happen to cut off a life that hangs by a thread——"

"I understand."

"Of course you do." Mark relaxed a little, with a breath of relief. He stood looking down into her uplifted face for an instant, as if with the need for explanation so entirely out of the way, he must think how to say the little else he had time for. Mary waited without speaking, knowing somehow that he wished her to wait.

"I have to leave everything I wanted to say to you about this wonderful thing you've done. It can't be said in a hurry —I'd rather leave it than try to say one word of it. Only this—you must know how it all went to my heart, Mary. Never in my life. . . . And your tribute to my father. . . ." He threw back his head, with a shaken breath. "No, I won't try to say even that—it must wait. There's just one thing—I want to leave with you——"

He turned to the high chimneypiece behind him, and took down a small package which had been lying there. He put it into Mary's hand.

"This just came home to-day. It's nothing very much—only a bit of work of mine—but I wanted you to have the first copy. I meant to show it to you myself, but there's no time. At least I can leave it with you. I wanted to surprise you or I'd have told you about it long ago."

"Why, Mark!" Through the wrapping her fingers could feel a small book.

"It's nothing at all—hardly worthy of print. Yet I needed it for a purpose—something for my graduating classes to take with them into the world. . . . Mary, I must go."

Even as he spoke the study door opened, a confusion of voices sounded across the small hall. Somebody said loudly: "Where's Fenn? We must be off in five minutes."

Mark was speaking hurriedly again. "I may be back in a day or two—it may be a week or ten days. Meanwhile—I want to say this to you——"

Harriet put her head in at the door. "Mark—I'm awfully sorry to interrupt——"

"Yes—I'll be there. . . . Mary"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"*the light on the road* will go with me—all the way!"

He grasped her hand, looked closely once more into her face—a look which Mary with a sudden letting go of her reserves gave back with full intent to give and take all that there was in this supreme moment—such a moment as might never quite come again. The disappointment that he must go away, just in this hour, was so great that it had shown her, as nothing else had yet done, what it all meant and how much she had to give.

Not until she was alone for the night did Mary open the small package Mark had given her. She found it to contain

a slim book bound plainly in brown cloth. Upon its back in black lettering was the unpretentious title:

FOURSQUARE

TALKS TO MY CLASSES,

BY

MARK MATTHEW FENN.

Upon the fly-leaf was the inscription: *To Mary Rand Fletcher, from her friend, M. M. Fenn.* The date followed.

The whole thing was as simply done as that. It was like Mark, thought Mary, to make as little as possible of his own performance; not even to adorn his inscription to herself with a single flourish of presentation. She smiled down at the little book, realizing that she liked the look of it for its very simplicity. Then she sat down to glance at its contents. It was very late—nearly one o'clock, when she began to read the first chapter. At three she had finished the book.

Now she knew him! She hadn't known him before, she had only guessed at him, or so it seemed to her. But now he stood before her precisely as he was. "*Foursquare*"—that was Mark's very self. Did he himself realize what he had put into the little book?

The six "Talks" were six expositions of his own views of the responsibilities entailed upon those who have had the chance to study and the time to think—the necessity laid upon them to make their lives of value. Somehow into a hundred small pages he had packed stores of straightforward, logical, man-to-man address to the judgment, coupled with a fine persuasiveness so cogent that it could hardly fail to appeal to the will of those who read. The language was clear, vigorous Anglo-Saxon without the slightest attempt to garnish it with scholarly words and phrases. On the face of it, it would have been as intelligible to a workman with a common-school education as to a college graduate. Yet beneath its

surface lay a depth of rich meaning which the trained mind would be sure to recognize and appreciate—the touch of the student of life upon other students, confident of understanding. Altogether the little book was one of those virile, convincing expressions of personal belief which often have a far greater part in making concrete and workable the opinions and creeds of other minds and lives than many bulkier, more ambitious efforts. In a word, Mark Fenn was putting into the hands of his outgoing classes a bright lamp whose clear flame was of that very "light upon the road" so needed in a world where darkness is often rendered only the more confused and impenetrable by the smokily flaming torches of those who ostensibly seek to make visible the way.

Still holding the little book Mary went to a bookshelf and took down another thin volume of a very different outward character—bound in costly blue leather—"The Letters of Arthur Rand Fletcher, Headmaster, to an ex-Schoolboy." Different in external dress, to be sure—but how like—how like—in contents! Each the declaration, the manifestation, of a life fearless and forceful, bent upon touching other lives with the touch which invigorates and sustains, helps not hinders—the all-powerful human touch of the brother and the man.

Mary laid the two books together, cover by cover, plain brown cloth by rich blue levant, and looked at them as one regards the greatest treasures one possesses. It seemed to her that the minds and hearts of the two men they represented were beating sturdily in unison—and that the echo of that heart-beat throbbed in her own happy breast.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A Little Brown Book

"AND may you be interrupted?"

Rose stood in the doorway of the square room at the back of the house, its windows opening on the rear porch, in which Mary Fletcher had assembled all the books she possessed, a goodly showing. They had been reinforced by many hundreds from her father's collection—the shelves reaching to the ceiling making an interesting background for the workshop which the room had now become.

Mary did not look up from the typewriter before which she sat. She waved a protesting hand at the intruder and finished her paragraph. Conscious, however, that Rose had not retired but still stood waiting, she wheeled about in her chair.

"Rosie O'Grady," she said, "with all your astuteness, haven't you recognized the fact that nobody can turn the door-knob of the writer when he's in a frenzy of work without interrupting him? Much less stand looking on! Don't you know you may put to flight some perfect phrase that never

can be recaptured? Now go away, like a good, kind creature, and don't come back. I'm *working!* Let it be understood now and forever. I'm willing to be human and decent at other times—but when the mood possesses me at last I'm not accessible to anybody, and that's all there is about it. And I'm sorry I sound brutal, but only so can things be done."

"Yes, Miss Mary Fletcher, and well I understand it. But you have to be human right now, and that's all there is about that. The biggest thing you can ever do at that clacking little machine can't be compared with the thing that's for you to do this minute."

Mary stared at her. There was no mistaking Rose's tone—it was one not to be denied. Mary ran slim, warm fingers through her hair, pushing it back from her eyes, which had been glowing with absorption in her work.

"Tell me quickly, then," she commanded.

"Mr. Perry Gilfillan's wired Guy that he's to go abroad with him and study. He's to leave town this day noon. He can't go without saying good-bye to you. He's here—in the drawing-room, crazy with joy—and grief. Now—do you know what's before you? You can put down your made-up people and go lay a kind hand on the shoulder that aches for the touch of you."

Mary sprang up. "Oh, Rose! Of course I will. How wonderful—how splendid!"

"It is that. But—of course you know—what you've done to the lad. So you've to help him through a hard hour. And don't be in too much of a hurry to get back to your white paper. It's not the equal of a human heart to write on!"

Mary laid a hand on Rose's arm. Her face had changed. "Do you really think I need to be told that, you dear, wise person?"

"Not when you're once down out of the clouds. I just want to be sure you're down," said Rose O'Grady, her

severity relaxing. "Poor boy, knowing you's been the making of him, and he understands and is brave as the soldier he is. But saying good-bye to you—that's not just easy."

"I'll make it easy!" And Mary went out of the room as one who summons all her powers to a certain end.

An hour afterward she had returned from the station, where she had taken Guy with Rose in a hurriedly summoned motor. Gone for the time was the eager fitness for work, but she couldn't mind. There had been a half-hour alone with Guy when she had given him every particle of herself as a friend she could venture to give, forever enriching for him the memory of one he could only worship from afar. He had gone away with a touch of her lips upon his fair brow, and had left upon her hand the fervidly reverent imprint of his own. He had told her that everything was right with him, and that he would study and work till he made her proud of him.

"I'm proud of you now, Guy Carter," she had said. "And I want to tell you something. This last year I went through a long, dark time of discouragement, when I thought I could never work again. It's all past now, but it was just as I was beginning to recover that you came along. And you, Guy, helped me to get on my feet again."

He couldn't believe her, and said so, his worshipping eyes on her face.

"Oh, but you did! It was the sight of you, so crazy to make the most of yourself and your time that you went to work with one hand—one hand and a hurt, tired body unfit for work. But with a perfectly unbeaten spirit, Guy—a wonderful, beautiful spirit, of never giving in to hard luck. And—working with you—I caught it! Can you guess that if you had had a thousand gifts in your power, you couldn't have given me a greater one?"

The joy of that assurance had been almost more than he could bear. But it did for him what she had meant it should—

sent him away on that winged exaltation of the soul which is the most powerful aid there can be to keeping a heart brave through a parting which is harder than anything it has ever known. He would prove to her—he would prove to her—that he was a man; and he did. The last look she had of him showed her the same smiling face with which he had once gone away from a humble home to the Great War, and when he waved his crutch in farewell it was she who was nearer to tears than he, so pitiful and plucky was his aspect. Her thoughts did homage to the young soldier who so loved her that he could go away to work for her, knowing he could have no other reward from her than her pride in him.

But if anything had been needed to send her back to her own work, after a rest of some hours, with a greater longing than ever to create a worthy thing, it was the memory of Guy. Now indeed her fingers flew at the bidding of her brain. Deaf and blind to everything she worked on into the evening, and stopped only to go for the bedtime walk which meant the cooling of the fires sufficiently to bank them for the night and sleep. Next morning she was at her task again betimes, and all day she worked, now and then flinging herself out into the garden for a run down into the orchard, and returning each time with cheeks and eyes aglow, to shut herself again into her workshop and make the chips fly as before.

At luncheon Rose put in a word of protest.

"I know you're happy, by the look of you, and that's good for you. But you're still made of flesh and blood and nerves, and you have to take them into account, and not overdraw."

"Rosie, when I can work as I'm working now, I *can't* tire. If you knew what it is to me to be fit to make things go like this, after all the hours and weeks and months of drudgery! Such bad hours will come again, of course, but let me drain the cup of energy while it lasts. I'll stop in an hour or two more, I promise you—when the first shadow of my first real

book is done—bless it! It *is* real, Rosie—whatever the other things were. Sham, I think mostly, now—sham and shadow. But this—breathes, I *know* it does."

"I believe it," said Miss O'Grady, unexpectedly. "And I know the reason why."

"What is it? I wonder if you do know."

"Because you yourself breathe now, to the bottom of your lungs. You used to use only the top of them, before."

"You're right—as you always are," and Mary came around the table to put her arms about Rose and lay her cheek against Rose's curly red hair.

"There now—don't be making me foolish about you—there's enough already." But Rose patted the hands which held her, appreciating to the full the unwonted caress of one she loved to the depths of her warm Irish heart.

When the chapter was done Mary went for a wild gallop on horseback, returning to bathe and dress for dinner, refreshed and radiant. As evening came on she went back to the place of books and work, turned on a light, and sat down in a big easy chair to reread the pages she had written. It was while she was engaged with them, more critical yet more nearly content than she had ever been with any effort, that a step was heard in the hall and a well-known voice saying:

"In here? Thank you, Miss Rose—if you think she won't mind."

"She drove me out this day—but you—faith, I'm wishing you better luck, Professor," answered a second voice.

Mary sprang up as Mark came in and closed the door behind him. The sheets of the finished first chapter slid unheeded to the floor as she went to meet him.

"Mary! How good it is to see you!"

"Mark! When did you come?"

"An hour ago. I wanted to come straight over, but Harriet wouldn't let me. Said she'd heard the typer clicking all

day, and Rose had warned her and everybody to keep away. But I prowled around and noted complete silence, so I ventured. But I'd have come anyway, so don't give me much credit. What are you doing?"

"Tell me first what you've been doing. Come and sit over here. I want to hear it all."

He told it rapidly, the almost unbelievable good news. The great philanthropist had been favourably impressed from the first, had been about to set his hand to the papers which would give Newcomb a large sum of money; then had suddenly been taken with a relapse which had seemed to indicate the immediate end. Mark had been urged to delay, however, and had done so, hoping against hope. Finally the old man had rallied, his mind perfectly clear after days of semi-consciousness, and had executed the deed-in-gift which assured to Newcomb a permanent income of such size that all things now seemed possible. In effect it would transform the college, setting it on a permanent foundation.

"Oh, how splendid! So you're gloriously happy. And so am I—as if I'd always cared for Newcomb as I do now."

"Do you care for Newcomb?" he asked, watching her face. "Really care for it—the old, poor, obscure little college with no discernible future up till now—and its reputation still to make, as far as the most of the world is concerned? Even money won't give it position, Mary, you know—we've got to put into it something that even money won't buy."

"I know. But—you have that to put into it, if no other man has. Mark—I've read your book!"

"Have you?"

She was looking at him with something in her eyes which he had never seen there before, and which startled him with the recognition of its source. It was the look of the woman who has to lift her eyes to a man because she feels him head and shoulders above her. He looked back at her, and in his

face was the look of the man who can't quite believe that he can have inspired such a feeling, because he doesn't think himself worthy of it. But it was there, in her face, and with it—something else he had hoped to find there. The two things together might well make his heart leap.

"Before I tell you what I think of it," she said, a trifle unsteadily smiling and drawing a little away from him as he would have come nearer, "I want to read you my chapter. It's the beginning of the book I've been hoping for two years to write—only I couldn't find it—or find myself. Will you listen?"

His smile said that he would listen, if that was what she decreed. Listening wouldn't be hard, since he might look at her, even if he should find it difficult to keep his mind upon her work rather than upon herself. So she settled herself by the reading light, and he brought his chair opposite hers and took his place. The reading began, in Mary's low voice with its rich cadences which made hearing her a delight, no matter what she read.

Not a sound from him broke the stillness, except her spoken words, till she had finished. Even then, for a long minute, he neither moved nor spoke. Then he left his chair, came over to her, and taking both her hands drew her to her feet. His eyes looked into hers and there were hot tears in his own.

"Mary!" he said, under his breath. "Do you know—do you *know*—what you've done?"

She shook her head. "I know what you've done," she said. "You've given me, in *your* book, something that's made mine possible."

"No!—My plain little talks—I hardly had time to put them in shape. They're nothing—compared with what you've just read me. Why, Mary—I didn't know you were capable of such work."

"You've made me so."

"It can't be!"

"But it is. That little brown book—why, it set me on fire! There's something in it—I can't quite analyze it—but it's the thing I need to make everything possible. You make me *see*—feel—believe. It's as if—oh, I don't know if I can tell you——"

"I wish you'd try."

"It's as if"—she spoke slowly and carefully—"I'd not had power enough—not force—not will—not purpose. And then—as if I'd been connected up with just all that. Mark—it was *all* in the little brown book!"

"Oh, Mary!" It was all he could say for a moment. Then he managed to add a question: "But—your play? I thought that was everything—till you read me this other, bigger beginning. I wasn't responsible for that, in any way."

"Weren't you? Oh, Mark!"

But now it was she who could say no more. There was no need. He could hardly have borne more just then. The only relief to his surcharged heart was to pour out to her in a few broken sentences his amazement, his pride, his love, and then to take her in his arms. . . . In the silence which succeeded speech he told her even more.

THE END

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